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## Re-entering the Absurd in the Twenty First Century: A Study in Richard Nelson's Pandemic Trilogy *The Apple Family*

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### Abstract:

Since the Middle Ages, drama has started as a simple wagon in the market-place with unprofessional actors who acted occasionally to serve religion/the Church. By later centuries, dramatic actions steadily developed; and their growing popularity encouraged the construction of theatre buildings to host the increasing numbers of the audiences. Hence the simple facts about drama have therefore been settled: no audience or drama student can ever imagine these facts would ever change, until Covid-19 has unexpectedly undermined the drama simple facts as well as radically changed that. Concerning theatre, the current situations, however, have forced drama to evolve without actors appearing physically onstage. As a communal act, the theatre can hardly stop: human communication is one haven of man to escape one's loneliness, but such need is not expected to be part of man's surroundings. Hence, when drama resumes work, it does so cautiously. Richard Nelson's postmodern play, *The Apple Family: A Pandemic Trilogy*, is a play that is acted through Zoom screens, utilizing the cyberspace instead of the theatre. The curtains are replaced by a "sign out" or the dimming of the screen of the character. Characters chat through those screens, no more "aside" or audience-actor interaction. Theatre has become cinema-like in that it lost the physical existence of both actors and audience. There is no action as the plays remind us of Beckett, Ionesco and Pinter. The post-war depression and dehumanization that led to the emergence of the absurd is happening all over again with COVID-19.

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### Introduction:

The dawn of the third millennium has witnessed radical changes in human and global principles, the outcomes of which are the decay of various cultural and socio-political systems and the rise of new metamorphoses, the primal domains of which are in digital technology. Unfortunately, these changes have necessarily required the reformation of lots of ethos that aim at the very investment of the products of ongoing prominent knowledge. Such tendency towards the full employment of the de moda "knowledge", globalization and speedy technological applications, therefore, bring about new understanding transformations of human philosophies, cult and the "socio-political".

The domains of art and literature are inevitably not an exception. Since drama is primarily communal, it is, therefore, subject to such representations of human impulses.

One crucial issue that characteristically influences life events, and consequently theatre activities, is the pandemic of Covid-19 and its aftermath. As a socio-cultural experience, that faithfully portrays man's life in the midst of terrific turmoil of the pandemic multi-field impact. Most, if not all, economic, societal and human activities have literally come to full standstill. Man's everyday activities have eventually ended up into a block-down: the fear of the 'identified' Godot has overwhelmed all scenes, be they at home, neighborhood, or even the nowhere. Only the digital and/or technological domains have regained their roles. The digital has whole-heartedly replaced the expressions of feelings, emotions and intimacies: every type of representation is rendered into "ritual". The entire world

has turned into a Pinteresque "outside" though the Beckett Godot has publically declared identity, nature and absolute power! The very existence has become entirely absurd, illogical and useless, but it is a neo-Absurd because the 'danger' and 'terror' are now universal. Notwithstanding invisibility, the virus terrorizes man everywhere around the globe. Hence, the very measurements and lifelessness of the entire existence, especially with all means of human ties are severed.

Jean clearly admits that she is badly in need for a 'touch' though accidentally (Part I), and relatives and friends are deprived of the warm parental feelings: one dies lonely in the same way one lives (Part II). The sense of belonging be it familial, moral and social dies up. Andrew, for instance, is isolated and completely avoided by his spouse when he was suspected to have the virus.

The nothingness that defies man's life during the pandemic and the inactivity that stamps all fields would be normally contradictory to the facts of what drama is indeed. Nelson, nevertheless, is aware of the way life is pursued as much as he well understands the necessary elements of drama. Hence, he resorts to an artistic theatrical device that faithfully harmonies the 'setting'. This trilogy therefore deploys no action, no communication and no intimacy, simply because this is the very image of what life is. It is most likely that the assumption that Nelson's plays have failed as an aesthetically entertaining drama is unfair. "As such an opinion seems to ignore and/or depart from a realistically logical consideration of the Covid-19 global effect. Kant believes that art should appear to the readers/audience like nature, "free and unstudied" to be judged/flagged

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beautiful.” (Thorpe, 2015, p. 30) Nonetheless, it is believed that the trilogy is a success as it is faithfully an image of the very 'inaction' and vacuum of contemporary life. The ongoing 'social intercourse' has literally become, in Esslin's words, "a mere illusion". (Esslin, 1961)

The Theatre of the Absurd has become a well-known concept by the end of the twentieth century. It has started with the post-war disappointment of World War II. The term is coined by Martin Esslin in his book *The Theatre of the Absurd* (1961) in which he analyzes the plays of Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco and other playwrights of the time. Esslin defines the absurd as a new form of writing drama in which the prevailing standards of perfection do not apply anymore. The audience are shocked, according to Esslin, and they may or may not accept the new experience. Understanding the absurd, though, does not depend on the level of education nor the readings of the audience. A group of criminals in prison have understood Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* better than the educated audience of Paris. The criminals are familiar with the concept of waiting for something, Esslin believes, and they realize well that Godot would prove to be a disappointment once he shows up. Therefore, the act of waiting is more 'fruitful' than the actual presence of Godot.

**Many Absurd plays lack conventional plots. At times their characters appear to give meaningless speeches that contradict their actions; time and chronology are often disjointed, and when the plays end, so many loose ends are left hanging that audiences balk at paying full price for a ticket to what they believe is half a play. These plays have no moral lessons to preach, no distinct stories to tell; they are simply absurd. (Chui, 2013, p. 5)**

Esslin believes the absurd to mean being devoid of "harmony" and being "ridiculous" (Esslin, 1961). Ionesco, on the other hand, says "absurd is that which is devoid of purpose. ... Cut off from his religious, metaphysical, and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless." (Esslin, 1961)

The theme of the absurd have started very early in history with the myth of Sisyphus . Albert Camus discusses this dilemma in his book of the same title offering reasons why the youth refuse to live after the shock of World War II. Camus sees that questioning whether life is fruitful enough to be worth living is a fundamental question; as it may lead to suicide if the answer were negative. However, other questions which are not related to the reason of life are rather complementary. (Camus, 1979, p. 11)

**This world in itself is not reasonable, that is all that can be said. But what is absurd is the confrontation of the irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart. The absurd depends as much on man as on the world. (Camus, 1979, p. 26)**

It is, however, still a challenge to present such dilemma on stage. Although Ionesco may suggest that speech is enough on-stage as long as it is not limited: "One can dare anything in the theatre, and it is the place where one dares the least. " (Esslin, 1961) Esslin argues that language is never enough especially with the absurd as, if it proves anything, it would be the lack of communication. "Theatre is always more than mere language. [...] theatre can become manifest only in performance." (Esslin, 1961) The characters may hear what they need to hear or, worse, they may not listen at all. Such conversation could be more like two deaf people trying to communicate using inefficacious dialogue. Although the theatrical techniques have developed, including the digitization of theatre, the Absurd returns more or less the same.

In Nelson's trilogy, *The Apple Family*, language is reduced to a means to spend time on Zoom. The characters meet on Zoom so they are given no opportunity to commence in any other form of action. They can only talk to one another and pretend to have group meals. The absurdity is highlighted when they cannot report to have been doing anything of value all day long, before and after those meetings. In fact, they wait for the meetings daily because they have nothing better to occupy their time. This exchange of words, which falls under the form of a family meeting, ends up being quite repetitive.

Esslin writes, "In the Theatre, language is not an end in itself but merely one element among many", thus an author can "treat it freely" as it is possible to "make the action contradict the text" or to force "the language of the characters disintegrate altogether." (Esslin, 1961)

**Absurdist authors sought to provoke rather than convince or entice spectators. [. . .] —their general tendency was not so much to have a direct social impact as to question and undermine the potential of theater or other literary and artistic forms to have any impact at all on the deadened sensitivity of modern humanity. This defeatist and nihilist attitude received the predictable reactions of ribaldry, rejection and scorn, but it did succeed in jolting at least some of the complacency of traditional theater audiences and in highlighting above all contemporary society's inherent conformism (Forman, 2010, p. 13)**

Esslin elaborates on the futility of language by setting the example of two characters: the first expresses his feelings while the other understands "merely what he has

experienced, or expects to experience" (Esslin, 1961); people are expected to use language to communicate and, instead, they convey limited meaning depending on the other person's experiences. Therefore, what has been described as "social intercourse" is nothing but "a mere illusion". (Esslin, 1961) Therefore, returning to Sisyphus, the reader cannot comprehend him as a miserable man; a desperate man cannot go on living and doing the same thing repeatedly. Sisyphus must have been delighted or at least content, "for it is this imagination that ultimately promises the possibility of hope, renewal, and redemption." (Chui, 2013, p. 92) Moreover, this illusion of communication foreshadows an illusion of accomplishment as well. Sisyphus must have felt such sense of accomplishment, as well. (Pritchard, 2010, p. 123) The characters need to feel the passage of time; they need to distinguish their days apart. Although they try hard to make a difference, the activities are very limited. Richard finds joy in doing something different from his previous boring job, as he explains:

**Richard** **And so I analysed it. Thought about it. And I suddenly realized, that in my job, with the Governor's office – (Lists) I argue for things, I write briefs, I file things, but it's like I'm living a circle ... I get up, I do this work, and so forth ... It's a fucking circle. But here I am washing the dishes – this is just an example – and the pleasure this is giving me is, I suddenly realise, because it has a beginning, middle, and end. So, when I reach this end, I feel accomplished. (Part I, Section 3)**

The characters go about their houses trying to create a reason to live rather than activities to help them spend time fruitfully. They create this illusion for themselves like Richard does, that washing a few dishes is more definite, has an end and sense of accomplishment more than going to a real job and doing repetitive work.

**Richard (a joke) Jane, I can't wait to do the dishes ... He laughs. (Part I, Section 5)**

What Richard fails to notice is that he will always be doing the same, cooking and washing the dishes, as long as he is confined to his residence. This is exactly what the absurd circular plot represents: endless and ineffective passage of time doing repetitive work. The "absurdity of life lies in man's intrinsic desire to continue living tomorrow even though tomorrow is another day closer to death" (Chui, 2013, p. 5).

Barbara, on the other hand, acknowledges the fact that her confinement is not fruitful. She remembers the days when she used to go to work and have an actual classroom. Her job has been different though as the school year has a beginning and end, unlike Richard's

job. She finds joy and accomplishment through her students and she has lost that with the pandemic; the virtual class is not a real classroom after all:

**Barbara** **My old students have always been interested in what I had to say. Always before. And I am always very thoughtful about how I say things to them. I think about how I put things. I think I've been thoughtful and careful ... Then: Tim, two of my closest former students did text, the last couple of days, and asked me not to write again for a while. They didn't need 'advice' right now. I wasn't giving them 'advice'. I was trying to talk to them. 'Let's just pause this for now, Barbara,' one texted back ... For Christ sake ... (Part II, Section 3)**

The comparison between before and after the pandemic is what drives those characters to believe and act the way they do. It is a matter of which motivates them more. "Humans have only the meanings that they create for themselves. [. . .] Humankind is trapped in every aspect – meaninglessness within meaninglessness, absurdity within absurdity." (Martin, 2012, p. 91)

This reminds the reader of Genet's theatre which concentrates on "the abandonment of the concepts of character and motivation" (Esslin, 1961). Such fixation is on "states of mind and basic human situations, rather than on the development of a narrative plot from exposition to solution" (Esslin, 1961). The theatre here does not tell the story of a group of people confined to their homes because of the pandemic; it is rather conveying a thought to their digital audience: it is a "confrontation of the spectator with harsh facts of a cruel world and his own isolation" (Esslin, 1961). The play becomes "sardonic", as Esslin puts it, and it resorts to being "static" rather than telling a story with a moral lesson.

The pandemic forces the characters to wait for the ambiguous. Waiting is the replacement of the story line. That family waits for Richard to have a girlfriend, for Marian to talk about her new date, for Lucy to dance and amuse them, for the fight between Jane and Andrew to end, etc. The family waits for something but the audience never sees it accomplished. It is more like spending hours watching a cat-mouse chase. It spends time, but no accomplishment.

In Albert Camus: From the Absurd to Revolt, Camus is stated to describe the absurd as "a tension, born of a discrepancy between external reality and the human desire for familiarity" (Foley, 2008, p. 10) The "familiarity" in this case is the coziness of the 'home' which makes it an easy trap for our characters in the COVID plays. Esslin believes that "waiting" is an expression of time, however, Jeffrey Henderson, another modern critic, uses an extraordinary image to talk about the absurd time: "the avant-garde is a drama of broken

watches." (Segal, 2001, p. 427) Moreover when "time vanishes, everything in the Universe is fast losing coherence". (Segal, 2001, p. 427) Esslin comments:

**Waiting is to experience the action of time, which is constant change. And yet, as nothing real ever happens, that change is in itself an illusion. [ . . . ] The more things change, the more they are the same. That is the terrible stability of the world. [ . . . ] The play contains the elements of reality and fantasy in exactly the right dosage; time and place are sufficiently real to carry conviction, yet the world in which the action takes place is hermetically sealed off from anything outside the characters' field of preoccupation. (Esslin, 1961)**

Thus, this language in Segal's words has "a hypnotic, hallucinatory quality" (Segal, 2001, p. 410). Such language is the outcome of the absurd world they live in, the absurdity of their life, one thing leads to another. "Instead the absurd arises because the world is resistant to this kind of intelligibility: 'we want the world to make sense, but it does not make sense. To see this conflict is to see the absurd.'" (Foley, 2008, p. 6)

**I suggest that meaning-making, not meaninglessness, is integral to the plays characterized as absurd. Because of the plays' parabolic nature—metaphor, paradox, and a move to disorder—the reader or audience member is forced to confront his or her own worldview in order to create order out of the chaos presented in the plays. (Bennett, 2011, p. 8)**

Due to home-imprisonment of the pandemic, the audience seems to fathom the effect of waiting, as the prisoners have understood Beckett. The audience itself has changed as the theatre (as a building) and actual attendance is no longer available; technology is employed in order to assist reaching the home-imprisoned audience. What used to be applied to modern drama is longer credible. The audience is forced to a feeling of estrangement, as the characters are. Estrangement or alienation is another reaction conveyed by the classical theatre of the absurd, as well as the digitalized absurd.

The alienation the characters feel with the surroundings highlights the human needs. The audience is waiting for a vague future and this breathless waiting is escorted by fear. The fear is of many natures though: fear of being infected, of losing their jobs, of death, of losing their dear ones, of not being able to connect with other humans again, of dying alone in isolation, etc.

The alienation tolerated by the COVID-generation is preceded only by that of generations of the world wars when everything collapsed and the youth failed to anticipate ever recovering from the social and financial

tragedy. The sense of nothingness is accentuated by the fact that humanity has been defeated by something as tiny as a virus. "What we say to convey the absurdity of our lives often has to do with space or time: we are tiny specks in the infinite vastness of the universe; our lives are mere instants even on a geological time scale, let alone a cosmic one; we will all be dead any minute." (Nagel, 1971, p. 717)

**Richard [...] 'Friends,' he says, 'in these difficult days for our country we must keep as far as possible from each other.'**

[...]

**And she sent this one, 'The people who buy toilet paper are incredible optimists, they think they will have food.'**

**Jane That's not funny, Richard. (Part I, Section 3)**

The morbid humour used by Richard highlights the coping issues he may be going through. The "dark humor functions as a subversive form of counter-memory that allows expressing dissent from dominant narratives." (Ridanpää, 2018, p. 4) Dark humour always has a "target" or "victim" in an uncomfortable sense. (Ridanpää, 2018, p. 8)

The COVID-generation is presented with the new technology to beat the curfew. The play is acted via Zoon screens and the actors do not have to be physically on stage to perform. The media and art have switched to the digital means of communication in order to reach their audience.

**Practising theatre through the cyberspace is not a substitute for live theatre, however, but a viable performance alternative that suits specific conditions and meets the requirements of particular groups who love the theatre but cannot go to an actual theatre. Zoom theatre is not a broadcast of a prerecorded show, for it offers live theatrical experience close to that of attending a real theatre. It manages to create a theatre-like experience during the unprecedented crisis of lockdown. It embraces the reality of our current situation and tries to make the best of it. (Karam & Naguib, 2022, p. 152)**



Figure 1

*The Apple Family, Livestream on September 10, 2020. There are four active panes representing Richard with Barbara, Jane, Andrew, and Marian.*

The characterization of Lucy, in the third play, shows the problems art faces, including having to wear masks while rehearsing, not being able to use spacious places and, most importantly, not having an actual audience. Lucy trains and performs in her narrow apartment, having few or no audience that led her to perform to Barbara's family via Zoom; she is parched to have an audience, as every performer/actor is.

**The pandemic alters the methods of communication so live streaming 'as a medium of communication and connection has become not just a fancy entertainment device but the only viable alternative'. (Karam & Naguib, 2022, p. 151)**

It is most likely possible for all types of art to switch to digital except for those that require performance, like drama and ballet. The actual performance in the theatre includes the audience/actor communication as well. The collective feeling the audience have and collective reactions, including laughter, is irreplaceable. To dig back in history, the term digital theatre started around 2015 and was concerned with using technology during performance, like using written translation of providing sign language for the special needs audience as well as playing sound tracks or manipulating actors' voices. However, those who coined the term probably never thought the theatre itself would transfer outside the building of the theatre. Drama invades the comfort of the living room, like television and films. It is no longer restrained to a building one chooses to attend. Drama has always touched a nerve when dealing with human catastrophes as it was the best accepted by the audience. Moreover, translating the fears of people into actual scenes the audience can identify with has been the forte of drama.

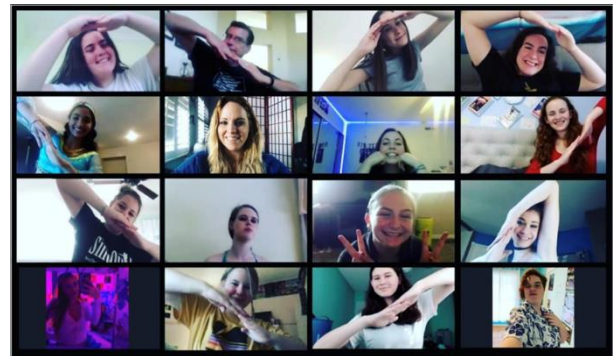


Figure 2

Actors performing on Zoom from their homes.  
<https://dancewithstarlight.com/zoom>

According Maslow, people's needs range from the most important to the other needs that may be luxurious and available only to those who have achieved the basic needs already. Maslow believes that man is "a hierarchy of needs. With the biological needs at the base of the hierarchy and the spiritual needs at the top." (Maslow, 1993, p. 186) Those needs are:

1. Physiological needs
2. Safety needs
3. Belongingness and love needs
4. Esteem needs
5. Self-actualization

Maslow, thus, vindicates the feelings of deprivation the isolated people feel. Maslow's physiological needs of food and water are provided for our characters as well as the homes (which is shelter). They are isolated, though; they need to feel loved and to belong. They need human encounter and to "touch someone."

**Marian I was lying in the bath last night. And it just occurred to me, I all of a sudden realised: I have not touched another human being for over three months.**

**Barbara Marian ...**

**Marian It's true. It's true. Not a hand. A shoulder. I haven't even been bumped by someone in the grocery store ... We're that careful. We've been told to be. (Smiles.) I suddenly realised there in my bathtub: this is what I'm missing ... And so this is why I'm feeling the way I feel ...**

**Then:**

**Thank God it's summer. If this had been the fall, and it was getting darker and colder ... I'd go mad.**

**Then she reaches out and puts her hand up to the screen with her palm and fingers.**

**This isn't the same thing. This is not touching ...**

**(Part II, Section 4)**

The other fear they have is the fear of the outside: "We've been told to be", as Marian puts it in the previous quotation. The Apple family share that fear with Pinter's characters as the latter believe everything bad comes from the outside. They refuse to go outside and they worry about anyone visiting. The Apple family, because of the pandemic, fear going out and try to avoid people when they have to go to the market. "The repetitiveness of the dialogue, its constant references to [. . .] the dangers without, suggest an unspoken fear of some unnamed danger." (Burkman, 1971, p. 12)

Characterization of the three sisters and brother sets none of them as a main character. All the characters have the same share of time facing the audience and pouring their souls into the screens (instead of on stage). The audience can empathize and identify with them all. They are no more than another work of literature they describe, they tell stories to pass the time.

**Barbara** [. . .] **The students are liking the project. I think if they can connect all this, what they're feeling, that feeling, to something else ...**

[. . .]

**Richard** **Why The Decameron?**

[. . .]

**Jane** **Richard, it's people telling each other stories while they wait out a plague. Hundreds of years ago in Italy.**

[. . .]

**Barbara** **And that's okay too. I think it makes you feel like doing something. (Part I, Section 4)**

All the characters share the pre-war, pre-COVID situation: they all have had jobs in which they used to achieve something and which have occupied most of their time. They used to see each other and interact with people, and loneliness is driving them insane. Barbara, for instance, is a teacher but now she has no classes and she spends her time doing nothing except waiting for the call with her siblings. She takes short walks (reported, as they cannot be acted on Zoom)

**Marian** (to Tim) **Except for walks, right? And then mostly into the cemetery where no one is ...**

**Barbara** **You walk in the cemetery now?**

[. . .]

**Richard** (Over this, to Barbara) **We should walk in the cemetery ...**

**Tim** **No one is there ...**

**Richard** **Perfect. (Part I, Section 2)**

**and this continues to Part III:**

**Barbara** **Last week, this is funny, I copied what you and Tim do, and took a walk by myself in the cemetery. I came across this family plot. I forget the**

**name. So there were all these little gravestones, this name on that and that name on this, dates, birth, death. Then at the corner of the plot there was one very small gravestone, only one word on it, no name, no dates, one word. This word: 'Aunt'.**

**Then:**

**I want to at least have 'Teacher' on mine too. (Part III, Scene 5)**

Nothing seems to change through the play, passing the time by taking walks in the cemetery, avoiding other people, trying to spend the time using language (talking and listening). These may seem like everyday life, but none of this is an accomplishment worth wasting their time.

The characters plan to do things more than they actually accomplish those plans. Richard, for instance, is a dreamer who focuses on perfection rather than reality, which is why he relatively fails to adapt. His spending time doing housework is a symbol of frustration; he is disoriented that he had to deal with unfaithful people like his politician ex-boss. He has to retire because he could not stand the lies and the inappropriate treatment from his boss. He is a constant critic of his sisters as well.

Jane, on the other hand, is apparently in a relationship but she forces herself and her spouse to stay in separate rooms because he goes out shopping for them. She fears COVID and, thus, Tim is to stay in her study and she leaves trays of food outside his door. She is devastated though when he has to stay with his daughter in another city and she tries to go outside the box for a change. Jane thinks of new possibilities, which sounds optimistic.

**Jane** **And, Tim, I was just telling Marian when she was here, I'm thinking of taking an online training course to become a crisis counsellor right now.**

[. . .]

**Tim** **You took part in this chat?**

**Jane** **I will. [. . .]**

**Jane** [. . .] **That feeling of being followed. Not by someone. That's paranoia. No, feeling you're being followed by yourself. A second self – who watches you, observes you with total calm and curiosity. (Part III, Scene 2)**

Nonetheless, she only dreams of the change, like Vladimir and Estragon in *Waiting for Godot*. She has taken no step forward to change her life. She identifies with the suicide cases due to her depression. Thus, she decides to help them. However, the training course is only an idea that will never be more than a search on Google. Camus states, "a man defines himself by his make-believe as well as by his sincere impulses." (Camus, 1979, p. 18) Jane, in Camus' opinion, is defining herself by expressing her wishes, regardless of the fact that she will not achieve any of them in reality. Her needs

and deepest wishes are revealed by the choice of job she is making. "We live on the future: 'tomorrow', 'later on', 'when you have made your way', 'you will understand when you are old enough'." (Camus, 1979, p. 19)

The passivity of Jane unfortunately makes her the target of the group's pity and advice. Her husband is thrilled to know that she has gone outside the house. Jane reacts negatively to the comments, nevertheless, saying that she has to eat after all so she has to go to the market (Part III, Scene 2). She would not die of hunger just because she refuses to go out usually. Sarcasically, Camus states that "replying 'nothing' when asked what one is thinking about ... symbolizes that odd state of soul in which the void becomes eloquent" (Camus, 1979, p. 19) Jane's negativity is not different from Camus' "nothing".

On the other hand, Tim is a unique realist who awakens in the third play. Tim constantly criticizes his spouse but he is extremely polite with her family. His isolation and the couple's chat through Zoom reveals the kind of relationship they have. Their chatting is devoid of love and may sound like that of two friends sharing a dorm room. They share residence but they rarely speak of feelings. According to the Maslow needs, this is only natural as they miss securing the basic needs like food, drink and safety. They consider love a luxury and showing feelings (or even requiring some) an extra burden. Moreover, when Tim stays with his daughter later on, the audience may not observe any difference. They already appear on two different screens when they live in the same house so it is only natural to be on two separate screens (most likely symbolic for different beds). Tim's realism develops later as he reads his old books. The philosophical outbursts he goes into are not fully understood by the listeners but they listen anyway because this is how they spend their time. Moreover, "living at the juncture of subjective and objective perspectives, we human beings just cannot help repeatedly asking unanswerable questions." (Pritchard, 2010, p. 133) Tim, deprived of human contact, resorts to his old younger self to communicate with through what he finds written on his old books.

The only character that seems to try to break free from the monotony of that life is Marian, who tries to find a spouse. She apparently has spent some time gardening (which is a hopeful symbol).

**Tim** I read somewhere, some writer, he said, 'You can't despair twenty-four hours a day.'

**Marian** I'll write that out and put it on my fridge, Tim.

(Part I, Section 5)

She seems to meet people though from a distance and behind masks. She visits Jane, takes a walk with Barbara, and then she goes on a date in the last play. She takes action while the rest of the characters live in false hope

of life going back to the way it was before COVID. Marian could represent the possibility of adapting with the pandemic and its consequences.

Lucy is another character who seems to be doing almost nothing. She lost her job as a performer with the lockdown. She performs the dancing and the rehearsals in her own little apartment. Art is choking here with the pandemic. She finds delight in stumbling over an audience, Barbara's family. She is ready to perform in front of them after midnight just to have an audience. They have to mute their devices and watch, so this is a new requirement to the digitalization of art. She suffers, like the rest of them, from the lack of human communication; she is incapable of Zooming with her mother due to time difference. Moreover, she gives Barbara a sense of accomplishment as the latter has taught her English sometime in the past.

One influential and ambiguous character is Yvonne; she never appears in the play but she influences Richard's life driving him away from Barbara and highlighting what Barbara misses in her life. Therefore, she is introduced as Barbara's silent foil. She is funny, sociable, defiant, and adventurous. She has a luxurious apartment and, most importantly, she has a companion.

The fusion of contemporary technology with a concept as old as the absurd brings to mind the fact that history repeats itself. People are forced to live the frustration repetitively though for different reasons. Mass depression has been there through history and unemployment highlights the futility of human existence. Almost half a century apart, Nelson's *The Apply Family* still echoes Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. The tone, circular plot, void language, the nothingness, and the "broken watches" are 'staged' as impeccable absurd.

## Conclusion

Theatre, of all types of art, has always been a mutual experience between audience and the performing actors. The immediate mass feedback transforms any play into an effective means to convey the author's opinion. Losing this precious 'contact' is often stressed in this play as it continues to represent the void life of the COVID generation.

Nelson succeeds in 'staging' *The Apple Family* as a play of waiting, focusing on the absurdity of the post-modern generation, which continues to hope for the best, like Sisyphus, without being able to actually transforming their situation.

The play uses the typical absurd features, like repetitive language, circular plot, and the concept of futile waiting. Nelson captures the absurd spirit effectively, with a different contemporary setting of cyberspace employing the fear of the virus, instead of World War II.

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