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The Absurdist Trope in Chase Cartoons: A Case Study of Tom and Jerry in Comparison to Silent Films

Abstract

This paper examines the absurdist trope in chase cartoons, focusing on Tom and Jerry and its parallels to the chase sequences in silent films. Absurdism, often defined by the breakdown of logic and the embrace of the irrational, is a key element in both media, shaping their comedic appeal. By analyzing the episodes of Tom and Jerry alongside iconic silent films, this research explores how physical comedy and surreal exaggeration are used to evoke laughter. The study draws on absurdist theory to argue that Tom and Jerry amplifies the absurdist tradition established in silent films, using the limitless possibilities of animation to exaggerate violence, physicality, and illogical outcomes far beyond the constraints of live-action cinema. The paper also highlights how both forms of visual media use repetitive cycles of pursuit and escape to create a sense of futility, reinforcing the absurdity of their scenarios. A deductive, comparative, analytical, and objective method has been used in this research, which illuminates the shared lineage and distinct innovations of absurdist humor in early and mid-twentieth-century entertainment.

Keywords: existentialism, alienation, silent films, Sisyphus, theatre of absurd, chase cartoons, Tom and Jerry

1.

Absurdism is a philosophical movement that emerged in the early twentieth century, rooted in the belief that human beings exist in a purposeless, chaotic universe where efforts to find inherent meaning are ultimately futile. At its core, absurdism grapples with the existential dilemma of

whether life has no ultimate purpose or order and how individuals should confront or cope with this reality. It is closely related to existentialism and nihilism but differs in response to life's lack of meaning. Absurdism was notably shaped by the works of philosophers such as Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, and, most prominently, Albert Camus. However, the thinkers explored different responses to the absurd condition of existence. Using the story of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac at God's command, Kierkegaard argues, in Fear and Trembling, that individuals must confront the absurdity of their existence when rational understanding fails with a 'leap of faith.' Declaring that 'God is dead,' Nietzsche argued that humanity is left without an external source of purpose, morality, or truth. In Thus Spoke Zarathustra , he urges individuals to embrace life in all its chaos and absurdity, not by seeking meaning outside themselves but by becoming creators of meaning.

Albert Camus, in The Myth of Sisyphus, diverged from their ideas and embraced the absurd as an inevitable fact of life. He recognized that modern life itself is absurd because it is marked by a futile search for meaning in a purposeless world. This awareness leads to what he called "the feeling of absurdity" (5)—the moment when individuals recognize the dissonance between their quest for meaning and the silent, indifferent universe. Camus writes, "man stands face to face with the irrational. He feels within him his longing for happiness and for reason. The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world" (26). Drawing on the Greek myth of Sisyphus, Camus revolts against the absurd and calls for continued living, a rejection of escape, and a commitment to face life's irrationality head-on. Greek demigod Sisyphus was penalized with the never-ending task of placing a massive stone from the plain to the top of a steep mountain. Every time he places the rock on the zenith, it rolls down, and Sisyphus has to repeat the attempt. Thus, Sisyphus' punishment becomes eternal. Camus identifies Sisyphus as the Absurd Hero who accepts the punishment happily and makes a new start with the hope of success. Camus, therefore, advocated for a response of defiance and acceptance. He argued that individuals must embrace the absurd and live with passion, even in the face of futility, imagining Sisyphus as a figure who finds happiness in the struggle itself: "The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy" (119).

The philosophical absurdism articulated by Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Camus laid the foundation for a dramatic form that would define post-war existential anxiety. The theatre of the absurd, famously coined and popularized by Martin Esslin, brought these abstract ideas into vivid and unsettling focus, allowing audiences to witness the absurdity of life through characters caught in futile situations in his 1961 book The Theatre of the Absurd. Esslin observed that the genre "has renounced arguing about the absurdity of the human condition; it merely presents it in being—that is, in terms of concrete stage images" (6). Whether through Beckett's endless waiting, Ionesco's nonsensical language, or Genet's surreal worlds, the theatre of the absurd echoed the philosophical assertion that human life is inherently devoid of meaning and purpose. Yet, one must continue to live within that recognition. Esslin noted that this form of theatre "can be seen as the reflection of what seems to be the attitude most genuinely representative of our own time" (4). In this book, he refers to Camus directly, noting that many of the absurdist playwrights drew from Camus' ideas of the absurd, particularly his call for a response of revolt and acceptance of life's inherent meaninglessness. Esslin draws the tenets of the theatre of the absurd, each corresponding to philosophical absurdism, such as the rejection of traditional plot and structure, illogical language and dialogue, repetitive and futile actions, alienation and meaninglessness, and so on.

Martin Esslin further discovers the absurdist expressions in the silent era films, which use visual language to explore human behavior in ways that often mirror absurdist philosophy. These films, with their slapstick comedy, surreal situations, and exaggerated depictions of the human condition, often reflected the same absurdity of life without much dialogue. The stylized, exaggerated performances and nonsensical situations demonstrate that human existence becomes a comical yet tragic struggle when stripped of rationality, language, and meaning. The use of humor to explore the darker aspects of existence—alienation, futility, and death—is a hallmark of both silent film comedy and the theatre of the absurd.

Chase cartoons, one of the most popular genres in the cartoon network, are considered to be created to provide laughter to the audience, especially children, through continual innocent events. The endless chase of Tom after Jerry, Sylvester after Tweety Bird, Wile E. Coyote after Road Runner, Sharko after Zigs, and Oggy after the cockroaches provide heartful laughter. However, a

close study of these shorts may explain the absurdity of the human condition and can also be modeled on the myth of Sisyphus. This article attempts a critical exposition to find out how absurdism manifests in chase cartoons and if the silent films and chase cartoons are different generic portrayals or complementary to one another. Moreover, the broader philosophical implications of the endless, repetitive chase as a reflection of absurdist themes will also be investigated. For the time being, shorts from Tom and Jerry will represent the whole chase cartoon genre for being the pioneer of this group.

2.

The theatre of the absurd follows what Camus propounds through the never-ending punishment encountered by Sisyphus. For him, just like Sisyphus, human beings repeat their jobs endlessly in a robotic form. Every single day is just the repetition of the previous day: “Rising, tram, four hours in the office or factory, meal, tram, four hours of work, meal, sleep, and Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, according to the same rhythm—this path is easily followed most of the times” (Camus 11). Camus never expects any change in the human situation. Therefore, repetition becomes the core feature of the theatre of the absurd, highlighting the futility, monotony, and often meaninglessness of human existence. This dramaturgical technique emphasizes the cyclical, stagnant nature of life, underscoring existential themes in which characters find themselves trapped in repetitive actions, dialogue, or situations. Absurdist playwrights like Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco, and Harold Pinter frequently employed repetition to strip down language and action to the point where meaning dissolves, creating a sense of alienation and disillusionment. For example, the two main characters in Samuel Beckett’s Waiting for Godot wait endlessly for a figure who never appears. The characters repeat actions, phrases, and questions, but these actions lead nowhere, emphasizing the futility of their existence. They consider leaving multiple times, but they never do. Estragon constantly struggles with his boots, taking them off and putting them back on for no apparent reason throughout the two acts. Naturally, the second act becomes the mirror image of the first, reinforcing the sense of stagnation and circularity. The dumb waiter itself, a mechanical device that repeatedly delivers orders for food that Ben and Gus cannot provide, becomes a symbol of their entrapment in Harold Pinter’s The

Dumb Waiter. The repetitive arrival of orders creates a sense of frustration and absurdity, as the characters cannot fulfill these requests, reflecting their impotence and confusion.

Likewise, the numerous attempts of Ollie and Stan (played by Oliver Hardy and Stan Laurel, respectively) to carry a piano to the top of an exceptionally long stairway in The Music Box bears an unmistakable resemblance to the myth of Sisyphus. Every time they try to climb the stairs with the piano, it only results in its rolling and crashing into the street. They must attempt again to deliver the music box (3:15-9:50). Film Block-Heads, too, has a lengthy scene where the tramps (featuring the same actors) attempt to ascend thirteen flights of stairs to Ollie's apartment. However, problems, though silly in nature, have been waiting for them at every attempt, causing them to get down (25:00-33:04). Their continuous futile attempt to reach upstairs fills the heart of the audience with humor. In Buster Keaton's The General, Johnnie places a large beam of wood on the track to stop the train, but when it gets stuck, he must go back and forth several times, struggling with the physical effort of freeing the train. The action repeats without yielding the desired result — progress — and emphasizes the absurdity of human action in the face of insurmountable obstacles. In the first half of the same film, the Union spies cut the telegraph wires to prevent Johnnie Gray from alerting the Confederate army. In the second half, Johnnie himself destroys the telegraph pole using his train. Noël Carroll argues, in Comedy Incarnate: Buster Keaton, Physical Humor, and Bodily Coping, that these repeated actions and mirrored sequences create balance and rhythm in the film. Instead of focusing on character-driven drama, the film's structure is tightly controlled and visually coherent, as they set up "an extremely satisfying system of motifs with telling variations" (Carroll 25).

In the same way, one can find out that the chase in these cartoons is repetitive and resembles the eternal punishment for Sisyphus. Chase Cartoons are mainly marked by some replicative story of prey eluding predator with hilarious consequences over and over again. Every time the predators seem almost to catch their prey, somehow, they fail. In the meantime, the duos dissolve, become out of shape, nearly dead, but somehow revive to their original shape and life, and the laugh-burst chase continues. William Hanna and Joseph Barbera invented this formula in Tom and Jerry in 1940, which has been followed by other series of this type. Right from the debut "Puss Gets the Boot," the domestic cat Tom (then Jasper) incessantly attempts to capture the mouse Jerry (then

Jinx), but only the mayhem and destruction that occurs. This plotline is the source of humor and key to the popularity of the genre. Tom and Jerry is handed over from Hanna-Barbera through Gene Deitch and through Chuck Jones to Hanna-Barbera again, but Jerry is never handed over to Tom, and the chase recurs one after another. Another short from this series, “Guided Mouse-ille,” shows that their chase is perpetual as with an exploration, they go back to the primitive time on Earth, indicating that the enmity between the two is primordial (5:48-6:21). They chase and are chased during the eras of both French King (“The Two Mouseketeers”) and classical composer Johann Strauss (“Johann Mouse”), which indicates their timeless chasing. In a world where actions are refraining, time is bound to be cyclic. If every chase occurs each day, then there is nothing like yesterday or today or tomorrow. Every day perfectly repeats its previous day and will be ideally repeated by the succeeding day. It seems that “[t]ime has stopped” (Beckett 36) for them. Every incident and every character in each short ultimately lead to chasing. Therefore, for the rest of their lives, the only action they have is chasing, just as Vladimir and Estragon will do nothing but wait for Godot forever. The endless cycles mirror the existential idea that life is cyclical and futile, with no inherent meaning. These laugh-burst animations reflect the notion of the ‘eternal return,’ where human actions are endlessly repeated without progress and the impossibility of escape from the absurd condition. Likewise, Tom and Jerry have chased in many lands, from the war-littered West (as can be seen in “Posse Cat”) to Hollywood Bowl (as in “Tom and Jerry in the Hollywood Bowl”). However, every single short ends precisely at the same place from where it began, as can be observed in the absurd drama.

3.

The absurdist theatre evokes laughter with vaudeville gags. Beckett makes use of it in Waiting for Godot through clownish characters like Vladimir and Estragon. The falling of Estragon’s trousers, their continuous struggle with boots and hats, and their actions— are all such examples of it. Toward the end of Ionesco’s The Bald Soprano, the characters’ conversations devolve into a string of disjointed words and meaningless phrases. As the breakdown of language occurs, physical chaos replaces the semblance of logical dialogue. The characters begin to act out their emotions

and frustrations physically. They shout, jump, wave their arms, and move erratically across the stage.

Silent-era films, too, employ various kinds of slapstick comedy to impart laughter. Comedy emerges not based on dialogue but through precise physical interactions with objects and the environment, making simple actions both visually clear and comically engaging. In The General, Johnnie loads a cannon while chasing the Union train and, accidentally, the cannon is unhitched from his train. The cannon tilts downward, directly aiming at him. Just as the cannon is about to fire, the train turns, and the cannonball hits the enemy instead (22:05-23:35). Keaton does not react with exaggerated fear; he remains stoic and that makes the gag even funnier. Even the final scene turns a romantic moment into a gag, where Johnnie repeatedly salutes passing soldiers while trying to kiss Annabelle (1:17:50-1:18:43). In The Pawnshop, the tramp (Charles Chaplin) is constantly engaged in the slapstick battle with his fellow worker (13:09-13:30). This scene resembles in “The Yankee Doodle Mouse” where Jerry throws things at Tom, which are either edible or related to food items (00:39-1:20). Again, chasing, which is the heart of chase cartoon, is also categorized under slapstick humor. There are chase scenes in silent-era comedies, mostly in the movies by Buster Keaton, as can be found in Seven Chances (40:15-53:29) and Cops (13:12-17:40).

Furthermore, both silent films and chase cartoons implement motifs like illusion, projection, and identity switching to generate a comic mood. At the end of the film Liberty, the policeman becomes pigmy as an elevator falls on him (18:45-19:05). Similarly, in due course of chasing, the chase-duo transforms into a four-legged stool, umbrella, balloons, spring, sliced, slim like a leaf, pipe, excessively long or short, and many others. This type of illusion indeed results in humor. Besides, in the film Block-Heads, while going up and down the stairs, Stan shuts down shadow windows, though Ollie could not (26:00-26:03, 26:38-26:41). In “Ah, Sweet Mouse-Story of Life” one can see that when the duo run into free-fall and Jerry imagines a question mark, grabs it and catches a pipe with it. It saves him from a thud. However, Tom imagines and grabs an exclamation mark, which he twists into a hook, but his efforts go in vain (2:10-2:40). The short “Bad Day at Cat Rock” opens with Tom walking across a beam on a high rise, and then he stops and stares into the air. A black dotted line appears in the sky to the beam where Jerry stands, and a knot is fastened. Then Tom

walks across it. Similarly, Jerry also designs a dotted stair for himself. He drops the stairs while Tom is on them, and Tom falls into a maintenance hole (1:21-1:46). These projections and illusions are similar to the dream-like phenomenon that can be found in absurd dramas like in Eugène Ionesco's Rhinoceros, in which all the people are transforming into rhinoceros.

Again, in Act II of Waiting for Godot, Beckett presents a hat-switching scene (Beckett 71-72) where the two tramps try each other's hat along with Lucky's and cannot be satisfied with either. Their repeated exchange back and forth creates a circus-like impression. If the hats symbolize their respective owner, then this scene can be seen as a comical representation of the instability of individual identity. In Jean Genet's The Maids, the two maids, Claire and Solange, engage in a repeated performance of a ritualistic fantasy in which they switch identities and act out the murder of their employer, Madame (35-65). There are examples of identity switching in motion pictures, too. The film Thicker Than Water ends with the two tramps (Laurel and Hardy) interchanging their characters and behaving accordingly (19:09-20:25). Identically, in "Nit-Witty Kitty," Tom becomes a mouse, and in "Is There a Doctor in the Mouse?" Jerry becomes stronger than Tom. These unbelievable occurrences create illusions that contribute to comic elements.

4.

Although physical comedy plays a central role in the theatre of the absurd, it often compensates for the breakdown of language. It serves to underscore the chaotic, nonsensical, and absurd nature of existence. This is crucial because words often fail to communicate meaning effectively, and characters resort to exaggerated gestures and physical movements to express their frustrations, confusion, and desires. Therefore, Beckett's Act II echoes Act I in terms of its events, dialogues, and interactions, except for some cosmetic changes. Beckett tries to emphasize that apart from a few minor changes that are largely unimportant, human life remains unchangeable and meaningless constantly from birth to death. Everything remains as it was at the beginning, which is really absurd. Thus, Estragon laments: "Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes, it's awful" (Beckett 34).

Likewise, silent films and chase cartoons, though primarily associated with slapstick humor and visual gags, frequently deal with themes that resonate with absurdist philosophy. In a world where

dialogue was absent, filmmakers had to rely on exaggerated physical action and visual storytelling, which often exposed the absurdity of human existence through repetitive, meaningless actions. While evoking laughter, there always lies a grim realization about the human condition and situation. Hanna-Barbera kicked off their first-ever single-reel series of chase comic tropes in 1940 with a splendid scene in “Puss Gets the Boot.” In the very first scene, the camera focuses on the mouse continuously running. Then, the camera zooms out and discloses the smug, superior cat holding the mouse’s tail. Thus, the audience knows that the efforts of the mouse are utterly futile (00:30-00:36). Under the surface of comedy, there lies a greater philosophic realization in this scene. Human beings, like the little mouse, ceaselessly try their best to reach their goal or to get rid of obstacles, but they are actually getting nowhere. This is also exhibited in the film One Week, where the stone-faced (Buster Keaton) consistently does his best in the face of constant change and challenge, yet all fall short. It is the cruel hand of fate that prevents them from being effective. In the same cartoon, the cat struggles similarly as he is caught with a broom by the landlady, signifying that none can escape from their fate, designed by their superior (2:36-2:38).

The actions of the absurd dramas serve only to foster the sense that the characters are objects of mysterious, arbitrary forces beyond their power. In Chaplin’s Modern Times, everything happens randomly and by chance. In Pinter’s The Dumb Waiter, Ben and Gus are controlled by an unseen, unheard hirer. Vladimir and Estragon are bound to wait for someone who never turns up. Just as Zeus is responsible for the fate of Sisyphus, the hirer and Godot play the role of fate-makers for the respective duos. Similarly, the task of chasing is also fated to the protagonists of this cartoon series. Mammy Two Shoes plays a role similar to that of Zeus in the refraining life of the animated duo. It is she who instructs Tom to get that mouse in numerous shorts. In “Part Time Pal,” she warns Tom that if he cannot keep the mouse out of the refrigerator, he will be thrown out of the house (00:25-00:40). So, Tom chases Jerry. To all intents and purposes, the landlady fated Tom to run after Jerry, and to save his own life, Jerry is bound to run.

In parallel, Charlie Chaplin’s movie Modern Times presents that the tramp—the role played by the director himself—suffers from a nervous breakdown by screwing nuts at an ever-increasing speed. He becomes so obsessed with the job of tightening screws that he starts tightening them whenever he gets them. He even tries to twist the buttons on the dresses of two ladies as if those were

screws (15:48-16:37). This scene attempts to critique the mechanical existence of human beings in a pseudo-comic way. Comparably, Tom and Jerry, too, become mechanized and thus chase in their robotic form in episodes like “Mouse into Space” and “Advance and Be Mechanized.” Also, they become so preoccupied with chasing that Jerry dreams of Tom running after him, which is evident in “The Milky Waif” (00:39-00:50).

Hence, this comic genre, too, “strives to express its sense of the senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought” (Esslin xix-xx). They reveal the darker truths of human existence besides being comic. Chuck Jones understands that in a successful seven-minute cartoon, the serious side is not antithetical to eliciting a belly laugh from his audience. Likewise, Harold Pinter states in an interview with Tennyson, “Everything is funny; the greatest earnestness is funny; even tragedy is funny” (qtd. in Esslin 205). In the interrogation scene in The Birthday Party, Goldberg and McCann’s questions range from the trivial and amusing to the nonsensical and terrifying: it starts with the laughable “When did you last have a bath?” and ends with an accusation of murder, “Why did you kill your wife?” (Pinter 48-49). Indeed, the entire series of Tom and Jerry is featured with this coexistence. Therefore, the cartoon is evidently tragicomic.

The original release of Tom and Jerry was on Feb 10, 1940. World War II had already started in 1939. It was probably created to satirize the repetition of the history of war and global conflict. Just as the First World War had sown the seeds for the Second, a conflict between Tom and Jerry breeds another conflict, hence, another episode. That is why the creators made sequels to some episodes; for example, “Fit to be Tied” (1952) is the sequel to “The Bodyguard” (1944), “Posse Cat” (1954) to “Texas Tom” (1950). Moreover, some of the episodes like “Tom-ic Energy,” “Jerry-Go-Round,” “Cannery Rodent” open with their chasing, indicating their chase as unceasing. Again, in “Tom-ic Energy,” when Tom and Jerry stop at a traffic signal in between their chase, another two pairs of cat-chasing-mouse are seen crossing the road (2:24-2:29). It shows that these two, Tom and Jerry, are not the only pair whose lives revolve around the chase, but there are many like them. This apparently comic situation reveals the meaninglessness of the existence of every human being.

5.

Existential philosophy proposes that human beings submerged in anxiety and despair can see the meaninglessness and subsequent nothingness in their unalterable life, which breeds a sense of alienation within themselves. This idea is very much pervasive in post-war art. Camus calls it irremediable exile since they are “deprived of the memory of a lost home or hope of a promised land” (4-5). Beckett’s debut drama is thus set against a strange and alien backdrop outside society. Again, though Ionesco’s plays take place within society, the characters stand alone. In The Bald Soprano, Mr. and Mrs. Martin, the husband and wife, cannot recognize each other. Their inability is a metaphor for the tenuous relationship among modern human beings, their surroundings, and their subsequent feeling of solitariness. Hence, Camus writes, “[t]his divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, truly constitutes the feeling of Absurdity” (5). Likewise, the protagonists of silent films are very lonely, even when in a crowd, and also have no personal identity. Chaplin’s Modern Times critiques modern industrial society’s capacity to alienate individuals from their labor, from each other as well as from themselves. The film humorously and poignantly shows how the individual is swallowed by the machinery of progress, reinforcing existential themes of isolation and dehumanization. F.W. Murnau’s The Last Laugh delves into themes of alienation from one’s social role, with the protagonist’s loss of status leading to a complete rupture in his sense of self.

Tom and Jerry, too, in their meaningless life, are very much alienated. In their world, they are each other’s only companions. Though there has been Mammy Two Shoes, Spike and his son Tyke, the alley-cats, Toodles Galore, Nibbles, Quacker, Cuckoo, and some other guests, they appear occasionally. When they appear, the duo uses them to experience a slightly different kind of chasing. Nevertheless, despite increasing the scope of the chase with their catalytic participation, they cannot make any difference in the duo’s life. Spike cannot protect Jerry forever; the alley-cats cannot always help Tom capture the mouse. They remind Lucky and Pozzo in Beckett’s drama as they come, try to interact and entertain the two alienated tramps, then leave. The fact that the guests’ appearance makes no change in the lives of the protagonists ensures their absurd

situation. Still, the others help them, and they, too, help the others, probably to break their loneliness and experience a different kind of chase in their unchangeable life circle.

Again, there is a possibility that the characters' surroundings in the absurd plays are mere projections. In Waiting for Godot, two types of projection can be found: one, by projecting a purpose, and two, by projecting some events while continuing the search for a made-up purpose. Godot is suspected to be a projection of the two derelicts, and Pozzo, Lucky, and Boy-Messager are projections by the duo to be entertained in the due course of their monotonous waiting. The idea of projecting a purpose implies the possibility that Jerry is a projection of Tom. Tom projects him to break the boredom of his solitary life, or vice versa. The projection of multiple Jerry at the same time in "Ah, Sweet Mouse-Story of Life" probably indicates this possibility. On the other hand, it is possible that Mammy Two Shoes does not exist and is only a projection by which they justify their chase, which defends their existence.

This is the existential crisis that modern people feel, as argued by Sartre in Being and Nothingnes s. According to him, they convince themselves that they must do the one thing fixed for them. They do not acknowledge any other options and continue living in 'bad faith.' The same critique of the absurdity of the human situation can also be implied in the chase-duo. In every Tom and Jerry series short, spectators find Tom chasing after Jerry. Many times, the cat almost catches the mouse, but somehow, it fails. Yet, Tom never gives up his attempt to capture the mouse. The mouse, on the other hand, never leaves the house to settles in a place where he could be safe. They find chasing the purpose and meaning of their lives.

6.

Through the myth of Sisyphus, Camus explains the absurdist situation of modern human beings and how they cope with such seeming futility. For him, there are only two ways out for modern human beings in their absurd situation: either by discovering meaning through a leap of faith or by committing suicide. He suggests that facing absurdity does not entail suicide. On the contrary, it allows one to live life to its fullest. Thus, he advocates a third possibility. One can accept the absurd situation and run on living without any meaning or purpose. He claims that Sisyphus must struggle perpetually without any hope of success. Camus calls it philosophical suicide. In "An

Explication of The Stranger," Sartre explains, "[t]he absurd man will not commit suicide; he wants to live, without relinquishing any of his certainty, without a future, without hope, without illusion, and without resignation either. He stares at death with passionate attention and this fascination liberates him" (6). Camus finds that Sisyphus is well-aware of his situation and accepts it happily. Thus, the French philosopher emphasizes: "One must imagine Sisyphus happy" (119). Sisyphus is not compelled but chooses his repetition. Hence, his situation is not tragic. If one could accept that there is nothing more to life than this absurd struggle, the person can find happiness as Sisyphus does. Otherwise, the situation will be unbearable. Esslin asserts: "The dignity of man lies in his ability to face reality in all its meaninglessness; to accept it freely, without fear, without illusions – and to laugh at it" (377). Didi and Gogo do not know this truth initially. As soon as they come to understand it, they choose to wait to remake their life. That is why, though they propose to go back many a time, "[t]hey do not move" (Beckett 54; 94) in any act. They are waiting, which is what they choose as their purpose in life. They are not confined. Instead, they are living their life in their own way. The tramps, too, are happy with their absurdist life, just like Camus' Sisyphus.

Similarly, both Tom and Jerry are very aware of the purposelessness of their lives. That is why Tom keeps chasing Jerry despite knowing he can never catch him. There are a few episodes wherein Tom almost catches Jerry but finally lets it go, as one can observe in "The Mansion Cat." In "Cat Fishin'" and "Tee for Two," one can see that Tom captures Jerry and uses him as bait for fishing or tee for playing Golf but does not kill him. This proves that Tom really wants to keep Jerry alive because he fears what he would do if Jerry were no longer there. It is only Jerry whom he chases. He knows that running after Jerry is the only purpose of his life. In "The Night Before Christmas," Tom even feels pity for Jerry when Jerry walks up and down slowly and heavily in the dense snow in a vain effort to warm himself and rescue him (5:48-7:27). Again, Jerry's run gives Tom a kind of scopophilic pleasure. That is why in shorts like "Puss Gets the Boot," "Dog Trouble," and "Puss n' Toots," he makes Jerry run without letting him go anywhere. In "Ah, Sweet Mouse-Story of Life," Tom kisses Jerry as he helps Tom to be free from the rain gutter; and immediately after kissing, Tom gets hungry, and the chase recommences (5:00-5:32). In "The Million Dollar Cat," Tom even forgoes a million dollars for the sake of his true happiness. He comes to realize that nothing is more satisfying for him than chasing after Jerry.

It is not only Tom who ensures that the chase goes on. Jerry, too, loves to be chased. He quickly feels lonely when Mammy Two Shoes throws Tom out of the house in “The Lonesome Mouse” and makes a deal with Tom to get him back to the house. In “Mouse in Manhattan,” he writes a farewell letter to the sleeping Tom and leaves for New York. However, he returns shortly before Tom wakes up as he learns that being chased by Tom is much better than anything else. He tears off that unread letter himself and kisses Tom (7:41-7:48). Both Jerry’s diary (“Jerry’s Diary”) and book (“Life with Tom”) are all about their chase. He cannot be happy with Tom’s friendliness. When Tom becomes a mouse in “Nit-Witty Kitty,” Jerry tries every possible way to turn him into a cat again. When Tom finally takes the form of a cat, he expresses his joy by kissing Tom. In “Calypso Cat,” while chasing Jerry, Tom gets attracted to a female cat and stops chasing. Jerry tries to make Tom angry only to get him back in their regular life. In “Springtime for Thomas,” Jerry even sends a forged letter to Tom’s rival in love, Butch, when Tom refuses to run after him. Thus, he manages to make an end to the blooming love of Tom for Toodles so that he can be chased by Tom uninterruptedly. In “The Cat and the Mermouse,” he rescues Tom from drowning. He again saves Tom by changing a railway track in “I’m Just Wild about Jerry.” In “Tom-ic Energy,” Jerry displaces the cover of a maintenance hole so that Spike, his savior in many cases, must run into the hole so that Tom can continue his chase. Again, in some episodes, the prey is presented as physically stronger than the predator. In “The Milky Waif,” Jerry becomes furious and lets out a loud roar, which turns Tom literally yellow. Then Jerry attacks Tom, banging the cat against the floor thrice, spinning him over the head, throwing him toward a garbage can and hitting the lid into the cat’s face repeatedly (6:42-7:05). In “Is There a Doctor in the Mouse?” the mouse magically makes himself bigger than the cat, and the cat is frightened. It proves that Jerry may possess the strength to make himself superior to Tom but allows Tom to chase him. However, in the next trope, “Much Ado About Mousing,” Jerry is again smaller than Tom, as always. It can be interpreted that the frightened Tom cannot satisfy the mouse in life, whereas the frightening Tom can.

Hence, it is quite certain that both feel uneasy if the chase between them is punctuated, so they repetitively chase and be chased. Evidently, they prefer each other while chasing. Otherwise, neither do they befriend to overcome the external troubles in “Dog Trouble” and “Triplet Trouble,” nor does Jerry follow the defeated Tom at the end of “Jerry, Jerry, Quite Contrary” and “Catty-

Cornered.” Chase is their happiness. They know it very well. Hence, they do not want to change their refraining life. Even though they challenge each other in a duel (as in “Duel Personality”), after a while, they go back to their chasing, as fighting a duel cannot satisfy them. They get satisfaction from chasing just as Mommy in Edward Albee’s The American Dream becomes satisfied by unnecessarily making “an absolutely terrible scene” (61) in the shop and buying the same hat she wants back. Every single day of the duo in Waiting for Godot ends with the hope that Godot will surely arrive the next day, so they continue to wait for him the next day only to be back with the same hope again. It is this hope that makes their waiting infinite and their actions repetitive. Tom, too, starts chasing Jerry with the hope that he will surely catch his prey this time. One may find their actions meaningless, but for them, it is the actual meaning of their life. Therefore, the absurdity is not necessarily equal to the meaninglessness, but it is in itself a meaningful proportion. Consequently, one can imagine the chase-duo as happy and carrying the true lineage of Absurd Hero, like the protagonists of the theatre of the absurd.

7.

Therefore, while primarily created for entertainment, Tom and Jerry cartoons exhibit several key characteristics of absurdist philosophy seen in both the theatre of the absurd and silent-era films. The endless chase, repetitive action, nonsensical logic, and blend of humor with the existential struggle in the cartoon can be seen as reflections of the absurdist view of life. The myth of Sisyphus, which Camus relies on to explain the absurdity of the human condition, can also be applied to the chase cartoon genre. Like every human being, every chase-duo leads a repetitive life endlessly. As their chasing is purposeless (since the predator never catches its prey), their life is meaningless, too, and what they get is nothingness. However, they never lose hope and find happiness in that condition. Besides, in their alienated universe, all sorts of communication have been broken down. Logical construction and argument pave the way to irrational and illogical speech and prolonged pauses. This makes the cartoons silent. Moreover, they have the Vaudeville gags, which are the heart of laughter in absurd theatre and can also be found in the chase cartoons. Therefore, Tom and Jerry are caught in a world where meaning is elusive, yet they persist in their futile conflict, embodying the essence of absurdity. Hence, by analyzing the tropes

and by comparing them with absurd drama and silent film, I conclude that the chase cartoons fulfill all the necessary criteria of the theatre of the absurd and silent film which Martin Esslin proposes in The Theatre of the Absurd and that the chase cartoons are another generic portrayal of the broad range of Absurd Art.

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