Chapter III

Subverting the Sublime: Ideological Implications in Tom and Jerry Cartoons

The uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from it being imbedded in the fabric of tradition. This tradition itself is thoroughly alive and extremely changeable.

- Walter Benjamin 117

The myth of U.S. . . . is at last being dismantled. But the Great American Dream of cultural innocence still holds a global imagination. . . capitalist ideology behind the laughing mask, the iron fist beneath the mouse’s glove . . . make simply visible a very complicated process.

- Dorfman 12

Imbedded in the Fabric: Ideology and Subversion in Comics

The instances pointed out in the previous chapters amply demonstrate that some comics and animated cartoons are still considered subversive and that criticism against the medium is growing. This makes an enquiry into the messages or ideologies and discourses “imbedded in the fabric” of comics and animated cartoons relevant (Benjamin 117). The concept of ideology has always been a key analytical tool in cultural studies. Ideology,
as we understand it, is a “product of discourse” (Hawkes 141), that is, a particular mode of knowing the world through signs and texts. Broadly speaking, it is about the ideas held in common by social groups in everyday lives. It also suggests that these ideas are organised in certain ways. The notion of ideology indicates that the group that holds it perceives and understands the world in certain consistent manner. But we cannot talk seriously about the culture and ideology, especially of the United States, without discussing the issue of race which is discussed in a later chapter.

Ideology and racial discourses may or may not be grounded in historical or empirical yet variable facts. Ideological messages transmitted by the media in any political, economic and cultural context are represented partly in language and articulated and interpreted through language and other highly elaborated codes and modes-- including visual forms and music-- which are further interpreted and used by people in routine social interactions. For instance, the tension of the final stages of the cold war gave its imperial officers the fur caps, which have long been a stereotype of Russianness (Thwaites 163). The origin and institutional association of such codes and discourses rise questions to purpose to which they are put. They manipulate information and images to construct a potent ideology that sustains the material and cultural interests of its creators. And their power stems directly from their ability to publicly articulate the preferred system of ideas.
In the most general and benign sense, ideology is organised thought. But as James Lull in his *Media, Communication, Culture* holds, “organised thought is never innocent” (7). It is part of an on-going conspiracy that tries to legitimise the preferred system of ideas transmitted by means of a “grammar of production through which the media universalises a style of life” (Martin-Barbero 142). A common technique, debatably, has been to ridicule other nations and peoples. Films, television programmes, comics, and animated cartoons chastised Germans, Japanese and the third world countries for years after the Second World War ended. As Lull says:

The cold war ideological standoff in effect before *perestroika/glasnost* of the Soviet Union provided a political context in which American nationalism and capitalism were exalted by blatant negative stereotypes of communist nations and peoples. The typical strategy has been to link good feelings about American culture [of which the product is a part] by encouraging the audience to laugh at the dramatised culture [and racial] incompetencies of foreigners. (12)

For instance, the movie *Rocky VI*, depicts a robotised Russian who succumbs to a muscular human American, and Evil Russians are met and defeated in *Rambo*, to cite only two examples from an exhaustive list of such films. Numerous such references are also found in comics and
animated cartoons like *Donald Duck*, *Batman*, *T&J* and others, some of which are discussed later in the study. In most of these the foreigners appear to be funny, rather than evil. There are a few cartoons that show the Red Indian who keeps saying “um” and “how,” the Negro who is lustful and criminal and the Asians who are greedy and sinful. Or as Frantz Fanon says, “Dirty Nigger! or simply, Look a Negro” (Fanon, *Fact of Blackness* 129). At this stage we “get the beginning of national and racial stereotyping” (Dixon 20). They not only assert and reinforce the preferred ideologies but also give the impression that the American way of life is liked and aspired to by Third World peoples and their governments.

Predominant ideologies and “ideological apparatuses” (Althuser, *Ideology* 139) reflect the values of society’s politically or economically powerful institutions and individuals who are in a majority of the cases the “producers and transmitters of the texts” (Shuker 17). The fact that a majority of these institutions are based in the United States is a situation involving considerable ideological debate. The popular cultural artifacts, including comics and animated cartoons, produced and manufactured by these institutions circulate value-loaded or ideologically charged messages. They in turn challenge the sanctity and popularity of the folk and mythical heroes of other countries. For example, a compilation of Walt Disney’s Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck, and other cartoon heroes like Superman and Tom and Jerry, have become perhaps the most popular television
programme that have an elevated position in many cultures. Tom and Jerry, Donald Duck-- and his family of Disney pals-- and other comic heroes have become more familiar in many countries than the heroes of their own history and folklore (Dorfman 97). This phenomenon is true in the Indian context also. The spectrum of modern western comic heroes has replaced the historical and mythical characters with machines and superheroes.

Before I proceed further, let me clarify the idea of subversiveness. The definition of subversion for the purpose of this study would be based on Antonio Gramsci’s social theory of hegemony. Though Gramsci lived in the early 1900s and died in 1937, most of his writings were unavailable to the non-Italian reading public until the 1960s. Since then, because of “conceptual advances within Marxist theories and [the] strategic relevance to movements for liberation in the developed capitalist societies” Gramsci has received increasing attention in the United States and Western Europe (Boggs, *Two Revolutions* 7). The popularity of his theories has grown ever since especially after the advances made by the capitalistic entrepreneurs. Carl Boggs, in *Gramsci’s Marxism*, describes hegemony as follows:

In Gramsci’s view, class domination is exercised as much through popular ‘consensus’ achieved in civil society as through physical conversion (or threat of it) by the state apparatus, especially in
advanced capitalist societies where education, the media, law, mass culture etc. take on a new role. (17)

Hegemony, therefore, can imply that all aspects of society and culture, including language, are tools of the dominant group for exercising their control over the marginalised segments of society. As Valentin Voloshinov holds, “all sign systems have not only a simple denotative role, they are also at the same time, evaluative” (qtd. in Meek 43). This helps in maintaining their control and status quo in any given society either on a conscious or subconscious/subliminal level. This can also refer to the “asymmetrical interdependence” of political-economic-cultural relations between and among nation states, or differences between and among social classes within a nation (Lull 31). Hegemony in the general sense implies a willing agreement by the people to be governed by principles, rules, and laws they believe operate in their best interests, even though in actual practice they may not, and where there is a lack of social consent through physical “coercion” or the use power or the threat of it.

Gramsci defines two important terms in his theory: hegemony and counter-hegemony. Hegemony, like counter-hegemony, is an organic process, and “as an organic process there are occasional shifts. These shifts allow opportunity for change and involve consciousness, action, history and especially language” (Williams, Comics 131). Counter-hegemony,
according to Gramsci, is the force behind true revolution and a counter-hegemonic structure is the only force capable of subverting “the capacity of dominant elites to manipulate attitudes, values, and life-styles through media, education, culture, language. . .” (Cultural Writings 40).

Intractably connected with the terms of hegemony and counter-hegemony are the concepts of reproduction and reification, of which the United States is seemingly the most expert user. Reproduction is simply the propagation of hegemony, and it is carried out through mass culture, folklore, language, and the media -- all the elements that are used by the dominant hegemony to control the subaltern group, the working class as well as any minority or sub group being dominated by hegemonic powers (Gramsci, Prison Notebooks 252-55). The popular cultural artifacts produced by these institutions are loaded with messages and ideologies of the dominant group who own and control the “means of production” (Marx 556).

A more insidious tool of hegemony is reification-- where hegemonic elements absorb counter-hegemonic elements and present them to the masses as their own. This process often dilutes the original revolutionary strength. It dilutes and distorts a new world-view into something more like the old-world view (Gramsci, Prison Notebooks 279-318). (The term reification has been borrowed from George Lukacs and is used interchangeably with rationalisation, alienation and commodification).
One of the reasons for relating reification with alienation is that the process takes away the “identity of the subaltern group as a group” (Williams, *Comics* 132). It sloughs off all characteristics that are regarded as distinctively their own and as Whyte says “penalises those who are not fully Americanised” (321). It is achieved in comics and animated cartoons by a set of binary oppositions that oscillates between the hero and the “Others.” As seen in most western literary works, films and comics, the hero is shown as a “gentleman” who is the embodiment of “rationality,” “honesty,” “self-control,” and is “law abiding”-- characters range from Uncle Scrooge in Donald Duck, Superman, Spiderman, the archrivals Tom and Jerry, to James Bond and others. The “other” is shown as a “pirate” who is “irrational,” “deceitful,” “violent” and a “criminal.” As Bluto in Popeye, Mammy Two Shoes in *T&J*, and Friday in *Robinson Crusoe*, to name a few. The hero, who is usually the representative of the dominant group, eclipses the identity of the subaltern group who might also develop “an emotional feeling and connectedness with other members of the [his own] community” (Fonarow 364) that reminds one/us of reification which is closely related to Gramsci’s “passive revolution” (*Prison Notebooks* 50).

The process of reification offers the space for an assumption that counter-hegemony is the force behind a true revolution, as opposed to Gramsci’s passive revolution. These counter-hegemonic forces are capable of “transforming false consciousness [or ideology] into objective
knowledge of social conditions and class solidarity” (Bratlinger 97)
subverting “the capacity of dominant elites to manipulate attitudes, values,
and life-styles through media, education, culture, language. . .” (Gramsci,
Cultural Writings 40). However, the counter-hegemonic process to a
certain extent dilutes the original revolutionary strength of the marginalised
segment of the population. As oppositions raised from within these groups
weaken “their own power, wealth, and status” by popularising the
ideologies of the dominant group (Gramsci, Cultural Writings 32).

The revolutionary strength of the subaltern usually goes unnoticed
in comics and animated cartoons as they rely on visually codified
representations, which in “cultural terms tap into moral and political
rationales and uphold two parallels: Manicheanism and Capitalism”--
which are two sides of one coin, through which American popular culture
propagates its ideologies (Gabilliet, Cultural and Mythical 203). E. J.
Hobsbawm, Benedict Anderson, and Walter Benjamin offer differing
perspectives on the significance of visual media in the formation of
national identity and national politics. Though they differ in their
approaches to the “nation” itself, they would agree that the print and visual
media can project a singular image of the “nation” onto a heterogeneous
people, as can be seen in T&J and ACK. However the use of
anthropomorphised creatures enables the producers and transmitters of the
texts to project their ideologies subtly or, in the words of Dorfman and Mattleart, to hide it “beneath the mouse’s glove. . .” (12).

This chapter attempts to show how the seemingly innocent cartoon T&J contains hegemonic tendencies and castigates the marginalised and the subaltern segments of society. By doing so, it hopes to open a discussion on the Jewish influence in comics, and also on the question of authority and censorship and its influence on the growth of the genre in general. The chapter also tries to investigate how this popular animated cartoon articulates its position on issues relating to nation and race.

**The American Way of Life**

The post-Second World War years saw a massive expansion of U.S. economic, military, and cultural power that was more or less unquestioned at home. The foreign challenges to the hegemony of the United States was met with military force, economic sanctions, and export to Third World countries of U.S. capitalist values and artifacts including comics and animated cartoons such as *Superman, Donald Duck*, and *T&J*. The comics, indeed, incorporated a strategy more succinct and transparent than any other comparable cultural phenomenon with their “innocence” that appealed to children and adults alike. Popular cultural artifacts to a certain extent act as agents of material imperialism that needs not only economic and political power but also a hold on people’s minds. They debatably act
as agents of American Capitalism that tries to persuade the people that the “American way of life” is what they want.

![Figure 3.1](image)

**Figure 3.1**

The first *T&J* episode that is discussed here is *The Yankee Doodle Mouse* (1943). This particular episode is noteworthy for its similarity with the comic book *Superman#53*. In both these comics Jerry (in *T&J*) and Superman (in *Superman#53*) are seen as the symbol of the United States with their stalwart posture saluting the American flag (Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.2 respectively). Both Jerry and Superman are portrayed as an integral part of the flag, almost inseparable from it. From the pictures, it is
evident that the function of Superman and Jerry is to reproduce the current hegemony. And the story line of both the episodes reinforces this opinion.

Figure 3.2

These scenes of Jerry and Superman in front of the American flag make an impassioned form of dialectical exchange in which the audience can identify the theme of patriotism set within the episode. However, these
comics manipulate specific historical events, not only as entertainment, but also as a form of propaganda.

This brings to mind Roland Barthes’ *Mythologies* in which he demonstrates the Signifier/Signified theory, with the example of a front cover from the magazine *Paris Match* showing a young black soldier in French uniform saluting the French National flag. The signifier, the saluting soldier, does not offer any further factual information on his personal life or identity. But it has been chosen by the magazine to symbolise more than the man. The picture, in combination with the signified, symbolises Frenchness, militariness, and relative ethnic difference, and gives a message about the great French empire and its citizens. The picture does not explicitly demonstrate “that France is a great empire” and that all her sons live without any racial discrimination or fear, faithfully serving under her flag (110). The combination of the signifier and signified perpetuates the myth of imperial devotion and success, thus neglecting the personal history and ancestral origin of that soldier. His history like that of the above figures of Superman and Jerry are shown as an integral part of the flag, almost inseparable from it.

Here it may not be out of the context to cite instances where Jerry and his associate Nibbles are identified as representative of the dominant class, and Tom is represented as a member of the subaltern group. At this stage I
would like to suggest that Tom can be seen as a representative of the third world masses while Jerry represent the dominant elites, however, this argument is open for debate.

The uniform of a soldier like the flag of a nation or a band like that of the Musketeers (the Musketeers is identified as Mouseketeer in T&J series) takes on a cultural meaning. For instance, in episodes such as *The Two Mouseketeers* (1952), *Touché, Pussy Cat* (1954), *Tom and Cherie* (1955), and *Royal Cat Nap* (1958) Jerry and Nibbles in their Mouseketeer uniforms derive their significance by the association it share with the nation. By associating the nation with symbols like the flag and military uniforms, the creators of cultural artifacts including comics attempt to reconcile complex social relations in terms of simple discursive relations.

In the background of the above discussion it can be held that the notion of the nation is a highly metonymic, or selective, representation of the actual nation. From a diversity of things that make up a country, it selects a relatively homogeneous range of things, and gives an impression that these alone stand for the nation by excluding the others in the name of race and ideology. This encapsulates the views of E. J. Hobsbawm, Benedict Anderson and Walter Benjamin about the significance of the visual media in the formation of national identity and national politics.
This raises questions on the origin of Superman and Jerry himself. Superman according to Ted White, is “a man [who] came to planet Earth from another planet [Krypton] metabolically adapted for greater gravity and far harsher environment than ours” and, on earth, with “his powers vastly multiplied” (17). The story of Superman has now grown into a modern myth--a myth which in some respects equals and parallels the myth of other mythical deities. As Superman Comics is an exhaustive topic in itself the present study does not intend to analyse it in detail. In recent years, a few critics like Hasan Bolkhari have raised questions on the intention behind the creation of *T&J* series, which is discussed in a later chapter.

It should also be noted how clearly these pictures separate the signifier and the signified, that is the “role” and the one who fills it. The flag enfolds the soldier in just the same way a “role” enfolds the person who plays it, or, in other words, someone who wears their national flag takes the role of the nation. The addresser in the picture distinguishes himself from the geographical place, political or racial entity voicing that he is nothing less than the “nation.” These images are powerful gestures when it is made in the name of independent or populist politics because “then this nation becomes the true nation which governments of either streak have forgotten . . . or neglect[ed] (Thwaites 166). This suggests the reason behind the sportspersons who wrap themselves in their national flags after every victory.
The First World War affected the American comic strip only superficially. But the Second World War caused profound and permanent upheavals in the comics, and it became impossible for the comics industry to ignore it. The heroes of many comic strips and animated cartoons rushed into the armed services and helped in the psychological war preparation. For instance, Terry became a flight officer in the Air Force, Pat Ryan a lieutenant in naval intelligence. Alex Raymond, Joe Palooka, Jungle Jim, Captain Easy, and countless other comic heroes found themselves enthusiastically battling against the Axis forces or fighting spies and saboteurs on the home front, and it is no surprise that Tom and Jerry also ventured into the war arena. The action in the *T&J* episode *The Yankee Doodle Mouse* is set in a cellar where Jerry pursues Tom and rushes into his Cat Raid Shelter, or mouse hole. Jerry launches tomatoes, Hen Grenades (eggs are used as grenades) onto Tom’s face creating a war-like atmosphere. He then reaches for a case of champagne and shoots off the corks (which are used as missiles), with each hitting Tom in the face and sinking the vessel and him into a tub of water. Then we see the first war communiqué that reads, “sighted-cat-sank same,” (on the official letter head of the United States), with the signature of Lieutenant Jerry mouse, suggesting that half of the battle was over.
The Yankee Doodle Mouse is a pseudo-warfare-style animated cartoon that makes numerous references to World War II technologies such as jeeps, dive-bombers, grenades, missiles, and torpedoes. Later we see Jerry observing Tom through a makeshift plumbing pipe made into a periscope, and seeing Tom approach his hole with a mallet in hand. The mouse charges the jeep made out of a cheese grater towards Tom, tearing his fur as the grater speeds past him (Figure 3.3). (It is interesting to note that the jeep has a sign plate that reads U.S.A). However the jeep crashes into a wall, sending a sack of flour tumbling down. Jerry grabs the sack and runs across the room with flour billowing out behind him as a...
smokescreen. Tom is barely able to see through the thick smoke and Jerry takes full advantage of the situation. Tom is seen wearing a bowl for a helmet, throwing a stick of dynamite towards Jerry who immediately throws it back to Tom. At the end of their firecracker war, Tom is seen with a blackface, with a flower appearing around his face. Later, Jerry jumps into his plane that is fashioned from a box. He drops a succession of light bulb bombs onto an unsuspecting Tom, which explodes on his head. He also launches a banana torpedo into the cat’s face. The cat shoots down Jerry’s plane, and we see him descending towards the floor in a brassiere used as a makeshift parachute (Figure 3.4). This scene has been heavily criticised, especially after the findings of Wertham who argued that scene depicting women’s body and attires of women would arouse the sexual instinct in children (Wertham 68). This argument gained greater currency in the aftermath of various civil rights and women’s movements. Despite the growing protest, it is surprising that scenes like this have been rarely edited when shown on television.

Tom then fires a dart gun at Jerry, catching him by the tail as he attempts to drive himself into his mouse hole. Tom grabs Jerry and ties him to a rocket which he lights up. However, Jerry ends up helping Tom tie himself. Jerry emerges from the ropes and waves to Tom as the rocket shoots up with a helpless Tom. It then explodes in the air provoking a set of fireworks overlooking the American flag. Jerry proudly salutes the flag
and we see another war communiqué that reads “send more cats” (like the earlier war communiqué this also appears on the official letter head of the United States) which suggests the end of the war.

Figure 3.4

*Superman* #53, with the title, *Truth, Justice and the American Way*, is the story of a foreign leader who turns against the democratic government in the United States. The United States government wants Marlo, the leader of Quarac, extradited and brought to trial for terrorist acts in metropolitan cites. Marlo is being held in the Russian Embassy. The United States administration asks Superman to escort the plane that is carrying Marlo to the United States. Superman agrees reluctantly, but
during the journey the plane is shot down by one of the “Sons of Liberty,” a terrorist group. It appears to the readers that Marlo is dead. However, in the last pages it is revealed that Marlo is alive, that Superman deliberately hides Marlo as he is aware that a U.S. major has fronted with the terror group. The depiction of governmental scandals may appear to border on the counter-hegemonic, or at least be considered passively revolutionary. But a close reading of the last two panels suggest this story to be reproductive of the current hegemony (Williams, *Comics* 132).

Most of the comics and animated cartoons began their production in the 1930s and 1940s. The Great Depression of 1929 brought the Roaring Twenties to a shuddering stop but for the comics industry this period is generally considered as its golden age. The comics produced during this period reflect the contradiction within the society and its need for escape. As a result this period saw the birth of some of the most popular cartoons ever made including titles like *Krazy Kat* that featured the changing values, identities and politics of the 1930s as well as issues of war and romance. Chester Gould’s *Dick Tracy* offered the readers of the 1930s much more than an escape. It offered a new way of ordering reality, even when everything remained at the edge of disorder. While Buck Rogers (also the name of the strip) and his friends stand for truth, justice, and democracy in the twenty-fifth century as the world battles the Mongol Empire, twentieth-century issues dominate this futuristic strip, reminding its readers of their own social and
political conflicts. The themes of *Little Orphan Annie* included economic collapse, unemployment, labour unrest and the gangster era. Segar’s *Popeye* combined everyday domestic antics with the fantastic adventures and no-nonsense heroics of Popeye, a formula that made the strip a favourite among the Depression-era audience. These are but a few examples of various themes of comics during this critical period and *T&J* with its domestic slapstick comedies captured the hearts of the millions.

According to Gramsci, the socioeconomic, cultural and political conditions may subvert the existing dominant class. For any dominant class to lead any historical bloc, it must have the consent of significant subordinate participants. The Great Depression of the 1930s had left millions jobless as the manufactures had cut down production. Farmers were evicted from their land as banks foreclosed. And millions of Americans no longer consented to traditional business practices because the depression disrupted business as usual (Artz 24). Without job, security, or opportunity, the so-called American way of life was not appealing. Under such conditions, millions joined unions, farm organisations, and radical parties (Preis 63). The 1930s were also the period when the first wave of Nazism began to be felt. The socioeconomic and political conditions needed for the maintenance of the existing “bloc” began to be questioned and alternative ideas from fascism, populism, and socialism began to appear. To regain the lost American Dream the capitalist
popular cultural artifacts played a crucial role by foregrounding the image of patriotism and nationality.

In response to the economic and political chaos, Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR), President of United States from 1933-1945, announced the “New Deal” programme that included a wide variety of measures aimed to bring about an economic recovery. The New Deal programme succeeded in revolutionising the U.S. economic, political and social life. The details of the programme are not discussed here. During this period FDR created the office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs within the motion picture section of the State Department. Its declared purpose was to “show the truth about the American Way” and to this effect it hired Hollywood studios to engender propaganda geared to fulfill the promise of the Good Neighbor policy of the United States (Piedral 72). Following the directions of the office of Inter-American Affairs, prominent Hollywood studios, particularly M.G.M., Twentieth-Century Fox, and Disney reinforced their cultural artifacts including comics with messages that projected the American Dream and the American way of life.

The ultimate goal of this film propaganda campaign was to mobilise the immediate neighbours of the United States, especially the Latinos, and create a desire of a pan-American union at all levels. But the entertainment industry is one that has “ostensibly [been] freed by its relentless pursuit of
fiction from a serious commitment to telling the truth about, or pointing out the cynicism of the American Way” (Piedral 73). It is not surprising, therefore, that such an industry should profit from the hypocritical defense of continental American colonialism.

The unadvertised reason for this interest had much to do with the commercial exploitation by the United States in different parts around the globe. The notion of the American way of life itself served at the head of this self-serving propaganda campaign. For the United States the anti-Nazi campaign of the thirties, the anti-communist propaganda of the forties, the anti-Russian campaign during the Cold War and recently the anti-Iraq and anti-Iran campaigns were nothing but good excuses to establish themselves and their ideologies in different parts of the globe. The United States posed not just as a model of Pan-American unity but also as the “butt of Pan-American seduction, serving, at once as organisational principle and orgasmic hope of the deprived and depraved” (Piedral 27).

Even as the entertainment industry tried to establish the accepted practices through sheer repetition of the dominant ideology, thus trying to maintain the status quo, they attempted to question and debate on governmental cynicism and hypocrisy with varying intensities. As can be seen in comics like Superman, Batman, and others where the superheroes are also the law-enforcers, the cynicism and hypocrisies existing in American
society are also depicted. We get direct and explicit references to the
government scandals on a close reading of the two panels (figure 3.5) that
seem to be reproductive of the current hegemony. It reminds the readers that
the United States has a system of checks and balances. The last panel shows
two officers agreeing with Superman and saluting him, while the General
thinks that Superman is politically naïve and prays that Superman “never turns
against us . . .” (*Superman* 22). A symbolic interpretation of the last panel
reveals that even if corruption exists in the United States, it is only one-third
of the officials who are corrupt, while the remaining two-thirds actively
protect the laws and ideals of the land (William, *Comics* 134).

Figure 3.5
There are similar references to the cynicism, hypocrisy, and corruption prevalent in the United States in T&J episodes. In most anthropomorphised cartoons such cynicism, hypocrisy, and corruption are rarely noticed as they operate subtly behind the mouse’s glove. In most cartoons, the “radio” acts the symbolic substitute for government. The radio was the official medium of the government to reach out to the people, and it is interesting to note that the U.S government still airs the weekly address of its president on the radio. For instance in an episode The Missing Mouse (1953) of T&J, we find government issuing warnings to the public through the radio.

In The Missing Mouse Tom is frightened after hearing a radio announcement that says: “Your attention please! We interrupt this broadcast to bring you this urgent warning. A white mouse has just escaped from the experimental laboratories! Before escaping, he consumed enough of a new secret explosive to blow up an entire city! If you see this white mouse, telephone officials at once! And whatever you do, remember! The slightest jar will explode this white mouse and destroy the entire city!” This cartoon opens with a bottle of white shoe polish falling upon Jerry, and turning him white. Jerry who overhears the announcement takes advantage of the situation until he falls into a tub of water and the white polish is washed away. Meanwhile, the real mouse enters the house, but the cat takes him for Jerry. However, he soon realises
that it is the real white mouse. The radio then makes the second announcement: “Your attention please! We have just learned from laboratory officials that the explosive contained in the white mouse is no longer dangerous” and assures that “the white mouse will not explode” (*The Missing Mouse*). On hearing this Tom kicks the white mouse which explodes, reducing the house to a giant crater. All that is left is rubble, and the radio which announces: “We repeat, the white mouse will not explode.” Tom appears from a pile of rubble and says, “Don’t you believe it!”

Comics are of course the home of the anthropomorphised talking animals and hence the creators have ample opportunities to communicate their messages. These highly coded and value charged messages and pictures never seem to be corrupted as they operate subtly. In the T&J episodes *Fraidy Cat* (1942) -- where Tom listens to a scary entertainment show; *Life with Tom* (1952) -- the new prize-winning news of the author Jerry mouse is announced; *The Missing Mouse*-- where a national warning is issued about the missing mouse; the influence of the government is depicted through the presence of the radio which by the 1940s had become a medium of the masses.

The depiction of governmental influence here, through the radio, may appear to border on the counter-hegemonic or at least be considered passively revolutionary. The disclosure of a “new secret explosive” to an
extent hints about government control and secrecy as they refuse to name the explosive. But on close reading the final scene of the cartoon seems to be counter-hegemonomic with the government in left in a thwart.

My attempt here is to examine T&J and anthropomorphised comics in general, in the culture of the fifties and beyond. The FDR era tried to bring a new ray of hope with the New Deal programme. The McCarthy era was a crucible moment when the American concerns about art and politics in relation to the popular culture were played out publicly and dramatically on the national stage. And indeed in the ongoing discussion on the national stage, the meaning of being an American, and the American way of life, were precisely the sites on which M.G.M chose to create its cartoons. The subversive activities were specifically made possible through the invocation of peculiarly American mythologies that favored and desired to uphold the American Dream and the American way of life.

**The Little Fuehrer: The Jewish Question.**

Like the question of the American Dream and the American way of life, the Jewish question and the influence of the Jewish community in popular culture has been seriously raised in the recent years.

“The Jewish question exists wherever Jews appear,” says Theodor Herzl, “because they bring it with them” (http:// www. biblebelivers.org.au/ij_ch1.htm). It is not their numbers that create the question, for there is
in almost every country a larger number of other aliens than Jews, but it is
the impact of the Jewish community and their economic and social
dominance that raises questions.

The American people would be vastly surprised if they could see a
line-up of some of the “American businessmen” who hold up their
commercial prestige overseas. They are mostly Jews. To make a list of the
lines of business controlled by the Jews of the United States would be to
touch most of the vital industries of the country -- those which are really
vital, and those which cultivated habit has made to seem vital. The motion
picture industry -- the fifth greatest of all industries -- is also entirely
controlled by the Jews. It has long been a part of the Jewish program for the
guidance of public taste and the influencing of the public mind. Every night
hundreds of thousands of people spend two to three hours at the Theater.
And every day literally millions of people spend from thirty minutes to eight
hours at the “Movies” (http://www.biblebelivers.org.au/ ij_ch7.htm). This
in a way suggests that millions of people every day place themselves
voluntarily within a range of Jewish ideas of life, love, and labour, within
close range of Jewish propaganda, sometimes cleverly, sometimes clumsily
concealed. A glance into comics and animated cartoons reveals that the
world of contemporary comics and animated cartoons in general, deals not
with traditional escapist themes but with issues such as clash between
cultures in history, the burden of guilt and suffering passed onto them, and
the trials and small triumphs of the daily work-a-day world. They are inevitably followed by the natural sequence that the civilised world is increasingly antagonistic to the trivialising and demoralising influence of that form of entertainment as is managed at present.

An interesting discourse/debate about these popular culture artifacts comes into existence through the dialectical exchange between the dominant “club culture” (here white culture) and the subordinate or “rave cultures” (Thornton 200). The material conditions of investment that is owned and operated by the dominant group enjoy a monetary reprieve to negotiate with necessities of the subordinate group, thereby reducing them into a position of structural inequality. As Thornton says:

These popular distinctions are a means by which cultural groups jockey for social power [in popular cultural artifacts]. . . They are discriminations by which [various groups] are assigned both social statuses and a sense of self-worth. This perspective envisages popular culture as a mutli-dimensional social space rather than as flat folk culture . . . . Rather than characterising cultural differences as ‘resistances’ to hierarchy or to the remote cultural domination of some ruling body, it investigates the micro-structures of power entailed in the cultural competition that goes on between more closely associated social groups. (208)
Historically, the dominant cultures have attempted to dismantle and replace the subordinate popular culture, of which we can find numerous references, especially of Jews and Blacks in the American context. Though the Jewish struggle for equality and fair treatment was linked to the struggle of the Blacks for greater opportunity, it was, however, not a struggle of equals. The Jews did not consider their plight equal to that of the Blacks. The Jewish and Black movements were such radically dissimilar institutions that no sense whatsoever can be made of the view that one was more evil than the other. Both these communities had been victims of unprecedented brutality in the history of mankind. While the holocaust was responsible for the death of at least six million Jews, American slavery was responsible for the death of approximately twenty million blacks, during the slave trade. According to Laurence Thomas:

“Holocaust and American slavery were two radically different forms of evil; there are evils in the Holocaust that have no parallel in slavery, and the converse is also true. But this truth does not make either of them any less a horrendous form of evil.” (Characterizing the Evil 153)

Yet, it is unfortunate that we try to understand the Holocaust and American slavery as two pernicious forms of competitive ideology that are dissimilar. The view that the hardships that one group has suffered are somehow
diminished and shown to be unequal in all respects to the hardships suffered by the other group has gained significance in the light of the heightened tensions between Jews and blacks, especially in the United States.

Nazis and Blacks have been stock villains in comics even before the Second World War but the image of the Jew as a villain has undergone transformation in recent years. The Jew is no longer shown as a villain, whereas the fate of the black character remains the same. This is largely due to the increasing economic and political power of the Jewish community. It can be suggested that most cultural artifacts, produced by the Jewish community are part of a conspiracy to remold the image of the Jews. But this statement has raised more questions than answers.

For instance, a seeming lineage is found in the T&J episode *The Lonesome Mouse* (1943), when Tom is thrown out of the house into the yard by Mammy Two Shoes as a punishment. Jerry makes Tom’s picture on his bed look like Adolf Hitler with his famous eleven-like moustache drawn on his face and spits at it (figure 3.6). There are numerous such references about the Nazis and Hitler. There are also references to bunkers, hiding places and other settings and images in several episodes of *T&J* that bring to mind the Nazi concentration camp and the Holocaust experience. Similar Jewish influence and anti-Nazi elements are found in
strips like *Superman* and other superhero comics, but the most notable example is Spiegelman’s two-volume graphic novel *Maus*.

Spiegelman’s *Maus* depicts the world of his Jewish parents in a simplified but starkly authentic way. A victim of the Nazis experience, the Jews were like mice to the terrifying cats of the Nazis and many of the Poles were to the Jews like pigs in their comfortable complacency. By alluding to the popular humour of feline sadism based on American culture’s sentimentalising of the mouse, we find similar instances alluding to Nazi experimentation with the Jewish body in comics like *Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Krazy Kat*, among others. For example, the “mouseness” of Mickey Mouse is only tangentially related to his essential character, says Joseph Witek (86). It suggests that he is nonthreatening (Mickey could not be a wolf, for instance), but he is not timid or sneaky, nor does he live in a hole. Mickey’s arch-enemy is Black Pete, a cat, but Pete often allies himself with dogs and monkeys to defeat the mouse. In *Krazy Kat*, the giddy surrealism of the strip begins with the reversal of the traditional animal qualities; the cat loves the mouse, the dog loves the cat, and the mouse aggressively attacks the cat (Witek 110). In *T&J*, the basic premise is the archetypal antagonism of cats and mice, but the stories themselves usually revolve around the discovery by the cat and the mouse that they need each other.
The Nazi ideology was a dehumanising one that turned its victims into less than human beings. For Hitler Jews were “undoubtedly a race, but they were not humans” (Hitler 213). The arguments of those who oppose literary representation of the Holocaust cannot be brushed aside easily. But to acknowledge the insufficiency of art in the face of the abyss of human evil poses its own paradox (Witek 97). The history of the Jews and Nazis shows many ups and downs, which the present chapter does not intend to analyse. For Hitler, he and his (Aryan) race were the “chosen people” (Hitler 96) who were destined to rule the world as “the guarantor of civilisation” (Miles 59).
Throughout Europe in the nineteenth century, the Jews were represented as ritual murderers, wanderers, and conspirators with the objective of world domination. These were revitalised and gained new force especially after the Second World War. There are also several examples in the present times of the use of the idea of “race” to identify and exclude Jews. In Nazi Germany, in the wider context of economic and political crisis, the idea of the Jews was that of a degenerate, unproductive, and criminal “race” as well as a “race” of exploiters and revolutionaries. There have been attempts by the Jewish community to vindicate their position as murderers and criminals. Recently, Hasan Bolkhari, cultural advisor to Iranian Education Ministry, commented that *T&J* was part of the international Jewish conspiracy:

This cartoon maintains its status because of the cute antics of the cat and mouse—especially the mouse. . . . Some say that the main reason for making this very appealing cartoon was to erase a certain derogatory term that was prevalent in Europe. . . . If you study European history, you will see who was the main power in hoarding money and wealth, in the 19th century. In most cases, it is the Jews. . . . Every Jew was forced to wear yellow star on his clothing. The Jews were degraded and termed ‘dirty mice.’ *Tom and Jerry* was made in order to change the Europeans’ perception of mice. One of the terms used was ‘dirty mice’ . . . . It should be noted that mice are very cunning . . . and
dirty . . . No ethnic group or people operates in such a
clandestine manner as the Jews . . . . Tom and Jerry was made in
order to display the exact opposite image . . . . The mouse is
very clever and smart. Everything he does is so cute. He kicks
the poor cat’s ass. Yet this cruelty does not make you despise the
mouse. He looks so nice, and he is so clever . . . . This is exactly
why some say it was meant to erase this image of mice from the
minds of European children, and to show that the mouse is not
dirty and has these traits. (http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi/
archives & area)

In the speech screened on Iranian channel 4, translated and
distributed with English subtitles by the Middle Eastern Media Research
Institute (MEMRI), Bolkhari holds that “the Jewish Walt Disney” company
created T&J as a public relations building device to improve the image of
Jews in Europe after World War II. He further holds that the portrayal of
the cute, clever mouse was intended to counter the nineteenth century
European portrayal of the Jews as “dirty mice,” which came about because
the Jews were “in most cases” the “main power to hoard money and

Though there are apparent contradictions and elements of
misinformation in the statement by Bolkhari, his general assessment is of
significance as most of the popular cultural artifacts (including the graphic novels) and films try to vindicate the position of the Jewish community. *T&J* was not a production of the Walt Disney Company, as held by Bolkhar; it was produced by Hanna and Barbera for MGM. Scholars like Bolkhari try to identify Jerry (the mouse) with the Jewry and suggest that most cultural artifacts produced by the Jewish community are part of a conspiracy to remold the image of the Jew (http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi/archives&area).

The findings of Bolkhari have been dismissed by most of the members of the academic community, with many critics raising questions of the Disney Company as Nazi sympathisers; some of them even pose to question the Jewish links of *T&J* and comment that though Jews do not believe in Christmas there are episodes in *T&J* series based on Christmas (http://memri.org/bin/articles.cgi/archives&area). There are several instances of the Jewish influence in popular culture and the apparent Nazi and Hitler concuss that operate in it.

**Oblique References: Tom and Jerry in the McCarthy Era**

During the 1930s, purveyors of popular culture offered a way of escape to the American people. The media that gave the American public the way to escape from the frustration of the depression plunged into crisis as public concern over the morality of comics in the McCarthy era rose to new limits. This concern had been simmering since the medium’s birth
and reached its climax with Wertham’s groundbreaking study, *Seduction of the Innocent*.

American comic strips and animated cartoons of the 1940s and 1950s reflected a society attempting to adjust to the profound changes that were erupting at a rapid pace. Americans had just won the war against the Axis in what the Allies termed “deplorable fashion, and Americans had been made to realise that they had more in common with their enemies than their national myth [had] led them to believe” (Savage 114). These public or national myths of the “American way of life” were heavily weighed against private tradition and experience. It also threatened the institutions of the subaltern with the ability to stamp their own meaning on the past. The burden of morality that the World Wars had imposed upon the people of America found outlets in comics and animated cartoons like *T&J*, *Superman*, and other comics at least for the time being. After the war ended the comic heroes began to take on the new role of gangsters and murderers in the streets of New York and Chicago, and violence once again became a part of the comic industry.

As with the theme of nationalism and war, some basic attitudes and values are laid down in the case of wealth and authority. As Gabilliet says “the moral pattern underlying superhero stories can be defined as a Manichean ideology stemming from the belief in the inalienable character
of private property” (Cultural and Mythical 203). For instance, in most of the episodes of T&J the chase is centered on the refrigerator and the food items in it. For the cat and the mouse, the refrigerator is the source of wealth. In this context, the values identified as “good” all hinge around the preservation of “legitimate” property links between persons and goods whereas those labeled “bad” tend toward the severance of these links and the fostering of chaos when one object belonging to “A’ illegitimately comes into ‘B’s possession” (Gabilliet, Cultural and Mythical 203). Consequently, the theme of “the menace” is always associated with the representative of the subordinate group.

Figure 3.7
The theme of the menace can be further reduced to a preoccupation with the conflict between a clearly distinguished “good” and a just obviously delineated “evil” resulting in “goodies” and “baddies” that can be readily identified as such from the drawings (Dixon 36). The theme of the menace often takes the form of a mad and/or criminal scientist who threatens the civilisation, or the United States, or the protagonist (the three are often seen as more or less the same) with some deadly power. The three major preoccupations often overlap and this character often carries national or racial characteristics. For instance the T&J episode Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Mouse (1947) is based on the classical story of Robert Louis Stevenson’s The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. It is however surprising that T&J series was not considered racial even when the ghost of Wertham was haunting comics in the McCarthy era

In 1953 in the House of Commons immediately after prayers a member presented a petition signed by thousands of people. It asked Parliament to take steps to ban the production, import and distribution of American and American-style comic books. It said that the “so-called comics which have as their theme horror, crime, violence and sex, which exposed for sale or for view throughout the country” are “dangerous and unsuitable for children.” (Wertham 67)
In true McCarthy-era fashion the United States Senate held hearings to investigate Wertham’s claims. But critics like Wertham and others were more concerned with the hidden images in these comics and the effect of these horror comics on children. Wertham argued that are lot of hidden drawing in comic strips that arouse sexual and criminal impulses in children. But even in the McCarthy era comics like _T&J, Donald Duck_ and others were not considered “dangerous and unsuitable for children.”

As a result of the debilitations in the Senate, a new Comics Code Authority was formed prohibiting any controversial comics that portrayed sex, violence, and criminal activities of any form. Consequently the most innovative company of the decade, EC Comics, was forced to cancel most of its line of comics. This included titles like _Vault of Horror_ (1954) and _Tales From the Crypt_ (1950), which years later were judged as classics.

The term McCarthyism is now often used to describe a period of intense anti-communist suspicion in the United States that lasted roughly from the late 1940s to the late 1950s. This period is also referred to as the Second Red Scare, and it coincided with the increased fears of communist influence on American institutions and espionages of Soviet agents. The term McCarthyism was originally coined to criticise the actions of the U.S Senator Joseph McCarthy (1908-1957). However, the term later took on a
more general meaning, not necessarily referring to the conduct of McCarthy alone.

It is difficult to estimate the number of victims of McCarthyism. During this time thousands were accused of being Communist or communist sympathisers and were imprisoned. The primary targets of suspicion were government employees, those in the entertainment industry, educators, and union activists. In the film industry more than three hundred actors, authors, and directors were denied work in the United States through the unofficial Hollywood blacklist. It might not be out of context here to refer to the fact that it was towards the late 1950s that M.G.M studio outsourced the production of its T&J series to Rembrandt Studio in (communist) Czechoslovakia. As Joe Vogel, the head of MGM in 1961, says, he and his team were well-satisfied with the results of T&J series produced by the Gene Deitch team. But unlike the original T&J that always had the line “Made in Hollywood, U.S.A” in their end titles, they were not allowed to cite the line “Made in Communist Czechoslovakia” (http://homes.acmecity.com/animation/search). In fact, Vogel and his team were not even allowed to credit any Czechs with their true names. For instance the name of the Czech animator Antoni’n Bure was shown in the title cards as A. Booresh and that of the production manager Zdenka Najmanov’a as S. Newman. (http://homes.acmecity.com/animation/search).
Though the iron shields of McCarthyism were evident in the entertainment industry, it was the Wertham phenomenon that profoundly affected the comic industry. Wertham’s *Seduction of the Innocent* warned that comic books were a bad form of popular literature and a serious cause of juvenile delinquency. The book that was a minor bestseller, raised questions in the minds of parents and galvanised them to campaign for censorship against the medium. During the same time, a Congressional inquiry was launched into the comic book industry by the U.S Senate. The comic responded by adopting a voluntarily established Comics Code Authority-- a self-censoring body within the industry.

*Seduction of the Innocent* cited overt and covert depictions of violence, sex, drug use, and other adult fare within “crime comics”-- a term Wertham used to describe not only the popular gangster and murder-oriented titles of the time, but superhero and horror comics as well. He reproduced these extensively, pointing out what he saw as recurring morbid themes that inflict “injury to the eye” (n.pag). Many of his other conjectures, particularly about hidden sexual theme-- for example, images of female nudity concealed in drawings of muscles and tree bark, or Batman and Robin as homosexual lovers-- were met with derision within the comics industry. Wertham claimed that Wonder Woman had a bondage subtext and was somewhat better documented, as her creator William
Moulton Marston had admitted it. However, Wertham also claimed that Wonder Woman’s strength and independence made her a lesbian.

The Wertham phenomenon had far-reaching effects in the McCarthy era. Some of the comics companies were even forced to withdraw their list of comics. The Underground Comics largely remained unaffected as they did not consider themselves as a part of the moral decorum upheld by Wertham. The present study, however, does not propose to go into the issue pertaining to the Underground Comics. Instead this study tries to look at the major thematic changes that appeared in the comics and animated cartoons of the 1930s and 1940s, especially the major changes that appeared in T&J cartoons during the period.

As mentioned in the earlier chapters the T&J cartoon began its production in the 1940s and gained wide popularity over the years. This popular cultural artifact was also victimised by the Wertham syndrome and McCarthyism. And it gained wider currency especially with the various anti-comics campaigns of the 1940s and 1950s. The immediate result of this was a series of censorships which included those imposed by the producers themselves, besides those imposed by governmental legislations.

Comics and animated cartoons tell how different peoples are represented in the lore of crime comics. Comics portray two kinds of people. On the one hand there is the tall, blonde, regularFeatured man
sometimes disguised as Superman, or Superman disguised as a man, and
the pretty young blonde girl with the “super-breast” (Wertham 124). On
the other hand are the inferior or subordinate peoples like the natives,
primitives, savages, “ape men,” Negro, Jews, Indians, Italians, slaves,
Chinese, and immigrants of every description. These people are shown as
having irregular features, swarthy skins, physical deformities, and oriental
features. In some comics the Americans are sometimes seen wearing some
kind of a Superman uniform while the immigrants and blacks are always
seen only in mufti. The brunt of this imputed inferiority is always directed
against the colored people and immigrants. The image of the subaltern as
“criminals, gangsters, rapists, as suitable victims for slaughter have made
an indelible impression on the children’s mind” (Wertham 87).

The moral necessity of violence has been used excessively in
various literary and artistic genres. This belief accounts for the paradox of
an ostensibly peace-loving and lawful people obsessed with violence. It
also helps to explain certain aspects of the actual character of violence in
America, in particular that which grows from their inability to control the
spread of firearms throughout the American society where the gun is the
prime symbol of moral violence (Wertham 89).

Comics and animated cartoons, instead of teaching obedience to the
law, glorify the right of the individual-- like Superman, Batman, Uncle
Scrooge-- to take the law into their own hands. For Wertham, these superhero “law enforcers are criminals in reverse” (114). They are really peddling a philosophy of “hooded justice” that is in no way distinguishable from that of Hitler or Ku Klux Khan.

Superheroes rarely kill the criminals they overcome. Instead they knock them out and turn them over to the police, or like the core Ranger, they shoot the gun out of the villain’s hands with silver bullets or some other metallic weapon, overpower him and then call the Sheriff. For all his dazzling capacities, marvelous weapons, and fantastic disguises, the superhero is a transcendent agent of society. In fact, in his other identity he is generally some respectable member of that society. As superhero, he gains no personal advantage or satisfaction from his heroic deeds beyond his basic and automatic concern to make justice prevail. Thus, he is purely reactive, a symbolic embodiment of the general principle that the criminal is certain to meet his nemesis. It is no wonder then that in such stories the villains are often more interesting, various, and enjoyable. The official conventionality of the myth and the certainty of a superhero’s ultimate triumph enable the reader/viewer to take delight in the villain’s criminality without having to worry about its consequences since the criminal’s defeat is inevitable.
But the violence in *T&J* suggests an alternative mode of reality. The structure of violence and madness in *T&J* and other animated cartoons is found to be in contingent reality. As examples in the earlier chapters show, the cat and the mouse duo adopted the most violent theatrical gags ever devised in the history of animation. The violence in T&J is abstracted and stretched beyond the known limits of cartoon strip fantasy. It is done in order to create a mode of violence and madness inaccessible to our average imagination. It can be noticed that in most of the cartoons after 1953 the degree of violence has considerably diminished. In the *T&J* episodes of this period the cat and the mouse duo are seen as part-time pals who go on adventures together. Here it would be no exaggeration if one were to comment that this strategy was the result of the Wertham Syndrome and of McCarthyism. Even the appearance of the duo has undergone considerable alterations, as has been mentioned earlier in chapter II.

*T&J* and scores of other comics and animated cartoons emerged not just morally unscathed, but positively victorious from the scores of Wertham syndrome and McCarthyism. Like the cat and the mouse duo, Hanna and Barbera soon adapted to the changing cultural climate. The duo emerged as the model for the harmless comics as demanded by the new Comics Code Authority. T&J soon became the favourite of all sections of the society, and its popularity is only second to that of Walt Disney.
Playing to the thin or superficial version of cultural differences as a means of establishing globally uniform habits of consumption, T&J and other animated cartoons can be viewed as a kinder, gentler form of transnational capitalism, one that is less susceptible to the changes of cultural imperialism. For Marxist critics, the flow of information in any form, including popular cultural artifacts, from the first world to the third world is part of an ongoing project to establish and maintain American hegemony.

The degree to which formerly marginalised peoples have accumulated cultural power in the post-colonial global order has generated a powerful cultural discourse. Time has come to challenge the self-proclaimed role of comics as a medium of “pure entertainment” and consider their educational role in producing ideologically loaded fantasies aimed at teaching, selective roles, values, and cultural ideas. The view of children as consumers has little to do with innocence and a great deal to do with corporate greed. The realisation that behind the vocabulary of family fun and wholesome entertainment is the opportunity of teaching and making children and adults alike adopt the “role of passive consumers” (Giroux 134). They also reassure that the world is not becoming a single homogenized realm because there are signs of resistance even in the face of two revered representations of popular culture (321). Progressive educators and other cultural workers need to pay closer attention to how
the pedagogical practices produced and circulated by comics and other mass media conglomerates organise and control a circuit of power that extends from producing cultural texts. As one of the most powerful conglomerates of imperialism, comics attempt to control the field of social meaning available to children, which has been challenged of late.
1 Yankee Doodle went to the town, a-riding on a pony. Struck a feather in his hat and called it macaroni. Yankee Doodle was the unofficial national anthem during the American Revolution. It was sung on public occasions often to annoy the British and their American friends. The word Yankee is from the Scottish word Yankie, which means a dishonest person. The word Doodle was an English slang for fool. Literally Yankee Doodle means a dishonest fool.