



## **(Auto)/Biographical elements in the Animated Cartoon *Tom and Jerry***

Aju Aravind

---

“A large part of any book is written not by its author but by the world its author lives in” and a large part of a text is determined by the age, gender and the socio-cultural background of its creator (Hollindale, 23). For instance, it is suggested that Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster’s, *Superman* is a Jew. This question of course is open to debate. It is interesting to note that Superman was created by two Jewish men in “Depression-era Cleveland,” at a time and place that stood between earlier periods of immigration and the impending Holocaust (Horn,42). In the two volume graphic novel *Maus*, Art Spiegelman narrates the story of his parents and their experiences during the Holocaust. The elimination of true parents, especially the mother, from the comics has a great personal meaning for Disney, as is evident from his animated cartoons like *Bambi*, *Snow White*, *Mickey Mouse*, *Donald Duck* and *Dumbo* (Dorfman, 225). Similarly, the Italian influence of *Tom and Jerry*, reminds us of the Italian origin of Joseph Barbera. There are also other arguable references in the *Tom and Jerry* series that hint at the life and relations of its creators—the directors William Hanna and Joseph Barbera, and the producer Fred Quimby.

There was no doubt about the future of the cat and the mouse, as they had already gained a place for themselves in the hearts of millions of people, especially children around the globe. But the future of the trio-- Hanna, Barbera and Quimby seemed to be in a dilemma, possibly due to certain issues that erupted amongst them. And we find such references from the various

**(Auto)/Biographical elements in the Animated Cartoon *Tom and Jerry***

episodes of the *Tom and Jerry* series. This paper intends to relate the events in the *Tom and Jerry* episode and draw the connection between these events in various episodes and the ups and downs that happened in life of the trio -- Hanna, Barbera and Quimby.

The 1949 episode of *Tom and Jerry*, *Jerry's Diary*-- the first flashback episode-- was part of an exercise to reduce the cost of production at a time when MGM was on the edge of closing down. The flashback episodes, though a part of the cost reducing measure, was also an attempt to review the earlier work and achievements of Hanna and Barbera. In this episode we find Tom snatching Jerry's diary in an attempt to read it. This episode combines events from the earlier episodes: *The Yankee Doodle Mouse* (1943), *Mouse Trouble* (1944), *Tee for Two* (1945), *Solid Serenade* (1946) and *Smitten Kitten* (1952). This episode hints at the attempt of Hanna and Barbera to enter into the Hollywood, which proved unsuccessful.

In the 1952 episode *Push-Button Kitty*, the last episode that featured Mammy Two Shoe, Mammy introduces a new mechanical cat called "Mechano." This act is probably suggestive of the mechanical measures evolved to solve the difference of opinion between the trio, probably over the question of royalty. Though there are no clear indications of this there are enough reasons to hold on to the belief that some serious problems probably financial, were erupting amongst them. In the 1953 episode *Life with Tom*, Jerry shows Tom a letter that states that half of the royalty amount is for him and a flattered Tom and changes his heart, which strengthening this speculations. There are indications of the growing difference of opinion among the trio, possibly over the issue of royalty in episodes like the 1954 episode, *Hic-cup Pup*. The plot of this episode is unique in the sense that in this episode Jerry mouse accepts his defeat and flees to "south for sake of health" (*Hic-cup-Pup*). This raises question as to whether Quimby, probably tired of the growing difference of opinion amongst the trio, trying to fled to the "south for sake of health." Fred Quimby soon distanced himself for the *Tom and Jerry* series and quits the scene.

In the 1954 episode, *Pet Peeve*, Mammy Two Shoe, the Afro-American maid was replaced with a new owner. The new owners, the husband and wife, tells Tom cat and Spike (also called as Butch) that "something's got to be done to cut down expenses" and decides that the one who catches "the mouse" will stay and the other would have to go "as the cost of feeding the two was higher..." (*Pet Peeve*). In their frantic effort to catch Jerry mouse, the cat and the

dog destroy the house, and eventually both of them gets kicked out. This cartoon was also the first episode where the owner of the house that was not Mammy. This episode suggests about some of the stringent economic measures at M.G.M. imposed on the new director-producers Hanna and Barbera.

In the episode *Pecos Pet*, released a year later Jerry's uncle Pecos stays with him while recording a television programme. The moustachioed mouse plays the song "Crambone" on the guitar. But midway through the session the string of his guitar breaks and the old mouse finds Tom's whiskers as a perfect replacement for the broken string. He pulls off one of Tom's whiskers one after the other until Tom cat is left with only one whisker. During the live performance on the television Pecos' guitar string breaks again. This time he reaches out of the television and pulls off Tom's only remaining whisker. This episode suggests the widening gap between the Hanna- Barbera and Fred Quimby. The incidents in these episodes suggest a downhearted Quimby had exhausted all means to achieve a consensus and offered to quit the scene. However, these assumptions are open to debate. It is interesting to note that it was the last *Tom and Jerry* episode to be produced by Fred Quimby.

The difference of opinion was settled for the time being with Quimby's retirement. But they were not permanently put to rest. In the 1957 episode *Tom's Photo Finish* the production and direction credits at the end of the episode were changed and from this episode onwards it read as "Joseph Barbera and William Hanna" instead of the usual "William Hanna and Joseph Barbera." One of the reasons for this could be widening discomfort within the team. The story and plot of episodes like *Tom's Photo Finish* and *The Vanishing Duck* (1958) strengthens our assumptions. In the episode *Tom's Photo Finish*, Tom frames Spike for stealing food from the fridge, whereas in *The Vanishing Duck*, Quacker, a singing duck, is purchased by George for his wife Joan. Quacker escapes to Jerry's hole when Tom tries to swallow him. During the chase Quacker falls into a tub of vanishing cream. Jerry and Quacker join hands and torment Tom, until he overhears their secret and renders himself invisible, enough to give Jerry and Quacker their comeuppance. This episode marks the final appearance of Quacker.

In the 1958 episode *Tot Watcher*, the last of *Tom and Jerry* episode Barbera and Hanna rather than the Hanna and Barbera era, we see the baby crawls away down the road past the police car off into a distance as Tom, Jerry, and the Police officers look on. The crawling away

## **(Auto)/Biographical elements in the Animated Cartoon *Tom and Jerry***

of the baby can be seen as the symbolic reference to the *Tom and Jerry* series itself. The *Tom and Jerry* series crawled away into a distant land passing the real Tom and Jerry (here Joseph Hanna and William Barbera) into a distant land -- Czechoslovakia. The series was later taken up in a distant land in the communist Czechoslovakia by Gene Deitch.

In this paper I have tried to give the history of the *Tom and Jerry* cartoons produced between 1940 and 1957 by William Barbera and Joseph Hanna and show that like most other comic strips and animated cartoons the *Tom and Jerry* series also conveys the likes and dislikes or the biographical traits of its creators. The *Tom and Jerry* series also tried to address some the issues that rocked the time. With their craftsmanship, Hanna and Barbera put forth the issues and ideologies that rocked their times subtly using anthropomorphised animals and cleverly concealing the political and biographical details beneath the “mouse’s glove” (Dorfman,12).

### **References:**

- “Comics.” *The Worldbook Encyclopedia*. 2000. Chicago, World book INC
- Dorfman, Ariel, and Armand Mattelart. *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic*. Trans. by David Kunzle. New York: International General, 1975.
- Hollindale, Peter. “*Ideology and the Children’s Book*.” *Signal* 55 Jan.1988: 11-30.
- Horn, Maurice. Ed. *The World Encyclopedia of Comics*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1976.

### **Videos:**

- Hic-cup Pup*. Dir. William Hanna and Joseph Barbera. MGM, 1954.
- Jerry’s Diary*. Dir. William Hanna and Joseph Barbera. MGM, 1949
- Life with Tom*. Dir. William Hanna and Joseph Barbera. MGM, 1952.

*Mouse Trouble.* Dir. William Hanna and Joseph Barbera. MGM, 1944.

*Pecos Pet.* Dir. William Hanna and Joseph Barbera. MGM, 1955.

*Pet Peeve.* Dir. William Hanna and Joseph Barbera. MGM, 1954.

*Push-Button Kitty.* Dir. William Hanna and Joseph Barbera. MGM, 1952.

*Smitten Kitten.* Dir. William Hanna and Joseph Barbera. MGM, 1952.

*Solid Serenade.* Dir. William Hanna and Joseph Barbera. MGM, 1946.

*Tee for Two.* Dir. William Hanna and Joseph Barbera. MGM, 1945.

*The Vanishing Duck.* Dir. William Hanna and Joseph Barbera. MGM, 1957.

*The Yankee Doodle Mouse.* Dir. William Hanna and Joseph Barbera. MGM, 1943.

*Tom's Photo Finish.* Dir. William Hanna and Joseph Barbera. MGM, 1956.

*Tot Watchers.* Dir. William Hanna and Joseph Barbera. MGM, 1958.

**About the Author-** Aju Aravind,Assistant Professor,Department of Humanities and Social Science,Indian School of Mines, Dhanbad, Jharkhand .

E-mail-[aaravind13@gmail.com](mailto:aaravind13@gmail.com)