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The Use of Animation in Propaganda: Caricature to Depict
the Enemy

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1.- Introduction

When we hear of political propaganda, what comes to mind is gritty films depicting the horrors of war, posters demonizing (or glorifying) figures such as Hitler and Stalin, or extravagant parades in honor of North Korean leaders, so it may come off as shocking that characters like Donald Duck were once part of propaganda movies saluting pictures of Hitler in a nightmare, or that North Korean kids watch cartoons featuring cute animals involved in territorial warfare. In this text I will be exploring the use of the animation medium as a means for political propaganda. More concretely, I will analyze the portrayal of the United States of America in two different productions, one being cast in a heroic light and in the other as a villain. To do this I will focus on two different cartoons from two different eras and places: the 1943 American short film “Der Fuehrer's Face”, by Walt Disney Productions, and the North Korean series “Squirrel and Hedgehog” by SEK Studio, which has been on air since 1977. By doing this, I hope to show the differences in tone, message and filming techniques employed by these two different cultures when it comes to political propaganda, and the importance of the animation medium in general when it comes to influencing popular opinion.

To properly understand the cartoons, it is necessary to know the context surrounding them. Because of this, there will be some sections in this essay devoted to the historical context of World War II and to North Korean foreign policies. As far as the actual analysis is concerned, I will do a plot analysis, but also look at those features unique to the animation medium, such as character design and caricaturization, I will also comment on the way they work as propaganda pieces, and how they use propaganda techniques such as the portrayal of the enemy or the depiction of one's own country as an ideal to follow. I will do this first to each cartoon separately, and then I will compare both to see in which ways they differ or are similar to each other in terms of methods, intended audience and the use they make of animation to deliver their message. However, before analyzing these cartoons as propaganda, it is necessary to clarify the concept of propaganda and its

characteristics.

2.-What is propaganda?

Garth S. Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell define propaganda as “the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist”(7). Under this definition, propaganda has a manipulative nature. It “shapes perceptions” through the use of carefully selected “language and images”(8), it “manipulates cognitions” via these shaped perceptions, and “directs behavior” by taking advantage of the manipulated minds in order to achieve a result that benefits the propagandist (13), without necessarily being beneficial to the mass public to whom the propaganda is addressed. The enemy is a recurring figure in wartime propaganda, taking advantage of the idea of “the other”, as an inversion of the qualities of those creating the propaganda. The process for creating an “us versus them” mentality is detailed by Maja Vuorinen, and is as follows: “creating others is typically done by establishing stereotypes, based on convenient exaggeration of select features” (1), and those “others” are then antagonized by “producing a preliminary division into Us and Them. This is followed by a process of othering, i. e. projecting unwanted features away from the self and onto the out-group, preconceived as separate and different, which thus becomes a negation of the self” (2) Depending on the country realizing the propaganda, and the enemy depicted, these depictions can have a racial tone, or be based on different customs and traditions. Vuorinen also takes notice of the use of a central figure in certain forms of propaganda: “An enemy leader is typically seen as the embodiment of all the evils that originally brought about the conflict. His distorted image combines a representation of his own personality with that of the entire enemy nation” (119) Because of this, whoever is creating the propaganda needs to establish a strong sense of self: something to compare the enemy with. In these cases, one's own country becomes a sort of “template” of everything good, and differences on that template are treated as something to be condemned.

During World War II, the medium of animation saw a surge of popularity as a source of propaganda, especially in the United States of America. The potential for cartoons as a propaganda vehicle is explained by Robert Philippe as quoted by Jowett and O'Donnell, saying that "Caricature is the most usual and familiar mode of this language. It was by means of such distortion that prints appealed to a wider public and gained universal popularity [...] Their methodology is accumulation and synthesis [...] It enlarges, shrinks, or disguises people, to reveal their many facets at a glance" (77). While it should be noted that Philippe is referring to static cartoons and not animation in this passage, the underlying motives of caricaturization and synthesis of characteristics of the enemy are the same. These cartoons use humor to ridicule the enemy, as stated by Vuorinen: "whereas hate propaganda motivates the public by inducing fear of the enemy, humour propaganda aims to creating a feeling of superiority"(60), while also noting that this humouristic approach is not subject to the same need for accuracy found in more serious forms of propaganda.

3.-American propaganda during World War II

Even though the medium of cinema was at its infancy during the first World War, its potential for propaganda was already evident. Out of the participating nations, most of the films were produced in Germany and Britain. The turnout of propaganda films from the United States was lower. After the war, propaganda films were created in the Soviet Union. Perhaps the most notable example is *Battleship Potemkin* (Sergei Eisenstein, 1925), highly regarded for its cinematic merits regardless of its political message.

The United States increased their propaganda production for World War II. An Executive Order was issued by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to create The Office for War Information, a branch of the United States government with the purpose to "formulate and carry out, through the use of press, radio, motion picture, and other facilities, information programs designed to facilitate

the development of an informed and intelligent understanding, at home and abroad, of the status and progress of the war effort and of the war policies, activities, and aims of the Government” i.e, to create and distribute propaganda.

As has been mentioned before, every country involved in the war created propaganda, but this essay will focus on the United States' turnout. Propaganda was everywhere during wartime, and animation was not an exception. The more flexible nature of the medium allowed for depictions of events that would be too difficult to recreate in live action, as well as allow for more exaggerated portrayals of the characteristics of the factions involved. Since a big part of propaganda is the exaggeration of features, this makes animation an ideal medium for its diffusion. This part of the essay will focus on the way the medium of animation is used to deliver the message on the short film *Der Fuehrer's Face*.

3.1 .- Analysis: *Der Fuehrer's Face*

Der Fuehrer's Face is an American animated short film from 1943. It was produced by Walt Disney Productions and directed by Jack Kinney. It depicts a nightmarish setting where popular character Donald Duck appears living in nazi Germany and working in a missile assembly line, before everything is revealed to be a dream, with him being safe and sound in the United States. The short satirizes Hitler's cult of personality and other aspects of nazi Germany in a comedic tone.

Donald Duck's role as the main character is remarkable. Of the main trio of Disney characters formed by Goofy, Mickey, and Donald, the latter was the only one who made any appearances in war shorts. His usage in this kind of movies may have been due to his more temperamental mood, which would make him fit better in wartime settings. Besides, it is doubtful that Walt Disney would agree with the idea of Mickey, the image of his company, wearing a nazi uniform, even in a dream sequence. Donald is a character that is iconic enough to guarantee the shock value of seeing him in a nazi setting, but not as iconic as Mickey, whose appearances in war-themed films could hurt the

company's image. But besides this, Donald is also more easy to identify with for the average American, due to the way most shorts portrayed him as the butt of the joke, or down on his luck, as opposed to Mickey, who was a more child friendly character.

This short uses a humorous approach in order to portray and ridicule the enemy. Here, the Nazis are depicted in the form of a music band that performs the title track. One of the Nazis is a Japanese man, who sings the line about “Arian pure supermen”, mocking the idea of the master race and nazi Germany's alliance with Japan, by having a racist caricature sing about it. Indeed, in

American propaganda cartoons of the era the anti-Japanese sentiment was expressed via racist caricaturization. The Japanese were depicted with yellow skin, buck teeth and slanted eyes. A more thorough view of the depiction of the Japanese can be seen in 1942 Popeye the Sailor short *You're a Sap, Mr. Jap*, in which, adding to the aforementioned racist facial features, the Japanese navy is depicted as using



The Japanese soldier exhibits some of the stereotypical racial features seen in World War II anti-Japanese propaganda: slanted eyes, buck teeth and yellow skin.

outdated ships and equipment and where one of the characters commits suicide by drinking gasoline and eating lit fireworks, parodying the Japanese tradition of seppuku. The Japanese are also depicted as cowardly, when they try to pass off as fishermen to fool Popeye, and as ineffective in battle.

Regardless, the main source of mockery in *Der Fuehrer's Face* are the Nazis. The nazi music band that appears at the beginning of the short is composed by several caricaturized figures. One is extremely fat, another is extremely short, another is extremely thin, etcetera. While such features do not really have anything to do with their condition as Nazis, it is likely that the animators decided to give them such exaggerated body types as an easy way to ridicule them. The fat soldier also does some rather effeminate gestures when singing the line “super duper supermen”, an easy mockery of traditional masculinity. Since the medium of animation allows for more freedom and variety of

expressions than live action does, it works perfectly when it comes to mocking someone, as is the case with the nazi soldier's exaggerated body types and movements. Animation also allows for more fantastical settings, as is the case of the city where the cartoon takes place, where the swastika shape is found everywhere, from the trees and clouds to the fences, as a parody of the nazi reliance on symbols and imagery.

As previously mentioned, propaganda often had a central figure to focus on, so Hitler's cult of personality is also parodied in the short. Donald has to salute portraits of Hitler, Mussolini and Hiro Hito that are in his house (Though Hitler is the only one properly caricatured. Mussolini is simply drawn as a fat man and Hiro Hito as a stereotypical Japanese). He also has to salute every single portrait of Hitler in his line of work, which is where most of the short's slapstick humour is derived



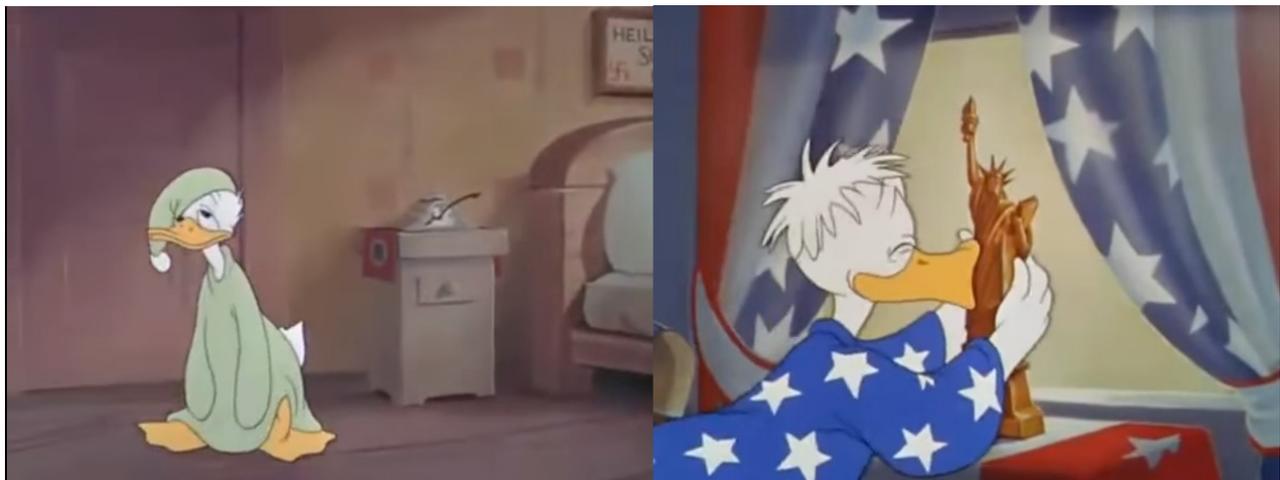
The Nazi marching band that appears throughout the short. Note the swastika-shaped bushes and electric pole in the background.

from. It is curious that, while Hitler, Hiro Hito and Mussolini are mentioned by name, the name of Germany is never uttered, the country being referred to as “Naziland”. This may be due to a number of reasons. Perhaps the writers did not want to ridicule the German people at large, and wanted to focus their mockery on the figure of Hitler. Apart from this, the name “Naziland” adds another element of comedy to the short, due to the phonetic similarities between the words “Nazi” and

“nutsy”.

The satire of the living conditions in Nazi Germany is delivered mostly via Donald Duck himself. He works in an armament factory screwing the tops of artillery shells, doing repetitive, and demanding labor. He is woken up by the music band at four in the morning to get to work all day. His living conditions are awful: his house is tiny and his breakfast consists of a single coffee bean dipped in water, a bacon and eggs-flavoured spray, and a slice of bread so old it has become

practically stone. By presenting these events in a humorous and exaggerated way, the short creates a situation where the audience is made to think about the poor living conditions of countries that are not America, while also being humorous in order to make it less hard to assume. The short's colour palette is very dull, with the backgrounds being made out of different shades of brown and grey, and the character's clothing using similar colours. This dullness contrasts with the scene at the end when Donald wakes up from his nightmare. His house in America is lavishly decorated and his clothes and decoration bear the red, white and blue colours of the American flag, giving it a very bright appearance that contrasts sharply with the dream scenes set in Nazi Germany. This is of course a not so subtle way to show how America is a great country (as Donald himself says: “Am I glad I'm a citizen of the United States of America!”), and in comparison Nazi Germany is a desolate place, once again working on the idea of the other.



A comparison between Donald 's Nazi Germany room and his real one in America. The brown and grey colour palette of the Nazi side contrasts with the bright blue and red in the American side.

A remarkable aspect of the last sequence is the projected shadow Donald sees on his wall. He sees a projection of a figure raising its right hand and, believing he is still in his nightmare, salutes it thinking it is one of the numerous Hitler portraits he has encountered in his dream. However, the shadow turns out to be a figure of the Statue of Liberty Donald has on his window. While it could just be a simple visual gag, the comparison between such an American icon and the typical Nazi salute is still quite striking. This comparison evokes a common topic in propaganda, the threat of

one's own culture being taken over or destroyed by the enemy. By showing a familiar image (the Statue of Liberty's raised hand) and twisting it into something perverse (the Nazi salute), the short feeds on the fear of the enemy, as if saying “if the Nazis win, this is what they will do to America”. The filmmakers themselves are doing this as well by turning Donald Duck into a Nazi, a familiar character in a strange and shocking context. Of course, this whole sequence could also be interpreted as a last joke being played on Donald, who has been suffering through the entire short, before revealing he is safe and sound in America for a happy ending.

The cartoon does not really focus on America's qualities as a country, other than in the final sequence where America is presented as the opposite of the desolate depiction of Germany. Since Germans are as white as Americans, there can't be a racial approach to their caricaturization, other than in the Japanese soldier. In fact, the cartoon is really compassionate on the German people at large, preferring to focus its satire on the figure of Hitler and the German army. If Donald is



A poster depicting the threat of Nazi troops taking over America.

supposed to represent an average German citizen under the Nazi regime, then he is depicted as following the Nazi lifestyle out of fear of physical violence by the soldiers, and not because of any true devotion for Hitler, and while his misfortunes are humorous in nature and meant to induce laughter, they also have an underlying element of threat, as an exaggerated depiction of how the Nazi regime treats its own people and how they would do the same to America and Europe. The short exaggerates Germany's living and working conditions to create a humorous effect, but also presents them in a way that can both create feelings of relief in the audience (since America is not like that), and make them pity the German people, helpless under Hitler's rule.

Der Fuehrer's Face was written from an American perspective, and thus it presents the United States of America in a positive light. Practically every participant involved in World War II indulged in propaganda, but after the conflict ended it fell into disuse, in part due to the lack of armed

conflicts afterwards. Propaganda was still produced during the Cold War and the Vietnam War but never in such high rates again.

4.- Propaganda today: The case of North Korea

However, this does not mean propaganda is in disuse today. An example of groups using propaganda nowadays are islamic terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaeda or Daesh. The latter's videos in particular have become infamous due to their relatively high production values, and their very graphic imagery that show executions of their hostages, normally to the tune of a *nasheed*, a form of islamic chanting. These execution videos normally focus on non-Arab victims of the terrorist group, since those are more likely to get global recognition. This propaganda is different to the one created during World War II in that that propaganda was created by the countries' governments themselves, while this modern propaganda is created by non-government affiliated groups. In the modern day, there is only one country which still produces propaganda regularly, and that is the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, more commonly known as North Korea.

North Korean propaganda is aimed mostly at the country's own population. The government controls all of the media produced, and only a very select group of government workers have internet access (the general populace can access a government-controlled domestic network called *Kwangmyong*, as reported by Matthew Sparkes in the online edition of *The Telegraph*) Most of the media produced follows a strong cult of personality for the Kim family members, and an exaltation of the *juche* (self reliance) branch of communism. Practically all forms of media create some form of propaganda. Jon Herskowitz and Christine Kim feature the comedy show *It's so Funny* in an ABC News article. This show has been on air since the 70s, and its format consists in a conversation between the hosts (two soldiers, one female and one male), where plenty of praise is given to the country's army and leader. Another somewhat infamous example appears in a BBC News article entitled "N Korea wages war on long hair.": the show *Let's trim our hair in*

accordance with the socialist lifestyle, which aired during 2004 and 2005, and where people were instructed on the hair styles that were approved by the government, with people that had unkempt hair being shamed by having their names and workplaces revealed on television. While the idea of such a program may result strange and even funny from a western perspective, it is telling of the degree in which the country's media influences the lifestyle of its citizens since they are children, as we will see here.

4.1 Analysis: *Squirrel and Hedgehog*

Squirrel and Hedgehog, which is the focus of my analysis, is a television series by North Korean animation house Studio SEK. Due to the country's general secrecy, reliable information about the cartoon is hard to find, but it is believed that the first episode aired in 1977. It has quite an erratic production rate, as only 32 episodes have aired since then. While it is not a consistent rate, there is generally an episode per year. It is Studio SEK's only long running in-house production, as most of their creations are one-off shorts and especially subcontracted work with European and American studios. Curiously enough, the show has been dubbed into English and Spanish by Italian company Mondo Films, but the dub removes some of the more violent scenes and changes the character's names, which is why this essay will use the original Korean uploads found on Youtube¹ with English subtitles.

Compared to the Donald Duck cartoon, which is just an 8 minute short, this is a 32 episode show of around 20 minutes each, so an exhaustive summary of the plot would be too extensive. At its core, the show is about the peaceful inhabitants of Flower Hill, whose population is made up of squirrels and hedgehogs, and the efforts made by the rival armies of the weasels, the mice and the wolves to take over Flower Hill. Later on the show the main character, named Geumsaegi, works as a double agent and infiltrates the wolves' army. My main focus will be on this part of the show, more concretely on episode 31.

1 Found under this address: <https://www.youtube.com/user/dprksquirrels/videos>

Before getting into the cultural and propagandistic aspects of the show, I believe it would be interesting to talk about it from a technical perspective. When people think about North Korea, its animation industry is one of the last things that come to mind, but there is a surprisingly big industry there, as reported by Susan Kitchens in Forbes's online edition: "SEK's 1,500 artists makes it one of the largest animation studios in the world". Due to the long running time and strange production rate, it is easy to see the way animation techniques evolved over time. While the first few episodes use all hand-drawn animation and coloring, around episode 20 the animators started employing digital animation, and it is not uncommon to see the digitally drawn characters over hand-painted backgrounds that were reused from earlier episodes. As the series advances, CGI animation becomes more common, especially when it comes to animating vehicles and action scenes. All these techniques are used together, making for a rather unique style of animation.

Regarding character design, the main "good" characters i.e. the squirrels and hedgehogs are drawn in a style similar to that of Japanese animation, with the use of round shapes, big colorful eyes and big heads in proportion to the body, looking similar to works such as *Fables of the Green Forest* and Osamu Tezuka's work, while the antagonists are drawn in a more western style, similar to animator Don Bluth's work. This style is more easily appreciated in the wolf characters, who appear late on the show. Since SEK's animators also worked on collaboration with European and American productions², it is easy to assume that their work influenced the character designs of the antagonist characters.



On the left, a character from the 1973 Japanese anime *Fables of the Green Forest*, on the right the protagonists of Squirrel and Hedgehog. Note the similar rounded shapes and simple facial features in both designs.



On the left, a character from Don Bluth's 1989 movie *All Dogs Go to Heaven*, on the right one of the wolf characters from Squirrel and Hedgehog. Note the more detailed facial features and expressions compared to the previous example.

² See Radio Free Asia's article "North Korea Quietly Emerges as Major Player in Animation Industry"

This divergence between character designs allows for the main characters to be more relatable to the audience, as well as for the antagonists to be more threatening. The character designs also emphasize the traits of each of the enemy factions. The mice are small and cowardly, the weasels are tall and slender, with small eyes to reflect their conniving nature, and the wolves are big and physically impressive, to show their emphasis on physical combat. As the protagonists, the squirrels have a more generic character design that allows them to fit several situations (though it is pretty jarring to see such cute characters commit violent acts in some of the episodes). Despite being a cartoon about animals, they behave practically like human characters. They use firearms, drive cars and wear military uniforms. It is not clear why animal characters were chosen for the story, but one possible reason is that these characters make the show more attractive to children, and it also makes each of the factions more easily distinguishable. Plus, there is the fact that animal expressions can be more easily distorted and can emote with their whole body, unlike humans. However, the only characters animated in a creative and “cartoony” way are the villains like Mulgmancho and the wolves, while the hero's movements are more stiff comparatively. While it is not uncommon for the villains to be more interesting than the heroes in fiction in general, there could be a reason for this. As seen on the previously mentioned television program *Let's trim our hair in accordance with the socialist lifestyle*, the North Korean regime is not specially fond of behaviour that is seen as obnoxious or flashy. By showing the villains acting in an unrestrained way it implies that such behaviour is undesirable, while also presenting the more contained hero Geumsaegi as the ideal role model.



The hero Geumsaegi maintains a static facial expression through most of the episode.



Meanwhile, Mulgmancho has a more varied set of expressions and emotes with his whole body.

Regarding the ideological content of the series, its political content is more subtle than the one found in the Donald Duck cartoon. For one, there are no countries or factions explicitly mentioned, though it is easy to see which animals are supposed to represent each country. That way, the idyllic Flower Hill where the protagonists live and the antagonists try to invade represents North Korea, the squirrels, hedgehogs and other friendly animals are the North Koreans, the evil and conniving weasels are the Japanese, the incompetent and cowardly mice are the South Koreans, and the violent wolves are the Americans. Besides this, the plot follows a standard action cartoon structure, where the hero tries to stop the villain's evil plans. The cartoon contains scenes that may be considered shocking for what is supposed to be a cartoon aimed at children, and the hero characters often manipulate handguns, which is something rarely seen in western cartoons, and do not hesitate to use violence.

In Episode 31, the hero squirrel Geumsaegi, who is pretending to have deflected from Flower Hill, infiltrates the Wolves' headquarters in order to rescue Dr Mole, while the mouse Mulmangcho tries to convince the wolves' that Geumsaegi is still loyal to Flower Hill. I chose to focus on this episode in particular because it gives us a good look into the way the wolves (that is, the Americans) are portrayed in the cartoon. They are depicted as very violent, with a strong focus on physicality over brains. The scene in the training field is a great showcase of this physicality: the wolves do complicated stunts that surprise the main character, and this is emphasized by the animation. As previously mentioned, the series stars animals, but they behave like human beings most of the time. However, in this scene the wolves run on four legs, and use their mouths and tails to attack each other while training. Animalizing them in this way is a good way to present them as very strong in a physical sense, but intellectually weak. The wolves are also generally drawn as taller and more strongly built than the rest of the animal characters.

However, physical strength is not everything. The episode is basically a duel of wits between

Geumsaegi and Mulmangcho, who are both under suspicion of being loyal to Flower Hill. Even though Geumsaegi is the only spy, he manages to trick the wolves into believing Mulmangcho is the true spy. Despite being the protagonist, he uses quite underhanded methods to achieve his result. He and Mulmangcho have a similar role in this episode, as people who are suspicious of being spies, but the way they are animated reflects their characters perfectly. Mulmangcho is animated in a very “cartoony” way, with lots of exaggerated movements and expressive poses, while Geumsaegi is very calm and calculating in his actions. When they are being “interrogated” (the wolves' idea of an interrogation being beating them up until they confess, once again satirizing the violent nature of Americans), Geumsaegi puts up a fight, while Mulmangcho cowardly tries to convince the wolves that he is not the spy. This way, by having the characters go through more or less the same situation, the cartoon shows the “correct” and “incorrect” ways to behave. The North Korean stand-in Geumsaegi uses his brains to try and outsmart his opponents, and only fights physically when it is strictly necessary, while the character representing South Korea becomes cocky and smug the moment he gets a bit of power, and behaves very cowardly when it comes to physical confrontation. Geumsaegi is also easily able to see through the trap devised by the wolves with the fake Dr. Mole, knowing that the real doctor is far too valuable for them. He manages to win the wolves' trust and incriminate Mulmangcho.

Another interesting scene is the one where the wolf guards steal some of the fish that another wolf was delivering as food for Dr. Mole. It features very lively and expressive animation to once again vilify the wolves, who are depicted as dishonest and stupid while the main character watches disapprovingly. Apart from serving as comic relief after the tense execution scene, this is also a way of showing that while the wolves have impressive physical strength, they are morally weak and unintelligent, which is why the hero must use a more underhanded approach to his mission to rescue Dr. Mole instead of doing it through brute force. In keeping with the theme of the wolves representing Americans and the squirrels being North Korea, this message seems to be a bit more

realistic than what we are used to in propagandistic media: North Korea cannot possibly beat America in a direct confrontation, so the American characters are depicted as physically strong but lacking in any other positive quality.

In short, the idea of Americans as portrayed in this cartoon is that while their physical strength is remarkable, their relaxed morals and lack of intelligence will eventually be their undoing, while the weaker but more intelligent and well behaved North Koreans can easily outsmart them. This message is strange considering the image of a military powerhouse the country tries to push towards the rest of the world, with their frequent missile tests and impressive military parades. In the cartoon, the Americans' violent ways needed to be presented as something negative, which is why the North Koreans' own military prowess is downplayed in favor of their supposed intelligence.

5.- Comparison

Now that each cartoon has been analyzed separately, it is time to compare them to see their differences and similarities, and see how things have changed (if at all) when it comes to animation in propaganda.

The first of such differences resides in the cartoon's intended audience. When *Der Fuehrer's Face* was released, cartoons were intended for a wide audience. *Der Fuehrer's Face* was released in theaters and covered by general interests magazines such as *Life*, in its November 1942 issue, and its title track topped the best sellers charts. However, as its title card says, *Squirrel and Hedgehog* is clearly intended for children. Making propaganda for children makes sense in a country like North Korea where indoctrination is so important. By presenting the political message in a medium that is attractive to them they will be more receptive to it than if it was in a news report or a newspaper. Similarly, *Der Fuehrer's Face* and other World War II cartoons served as a way of comic relief from other more serious propaganda pieces, while still maintaining their political message.

Regarding the tone of the cartoons, *Der Fuehrer's Face* is clearly comical in nature, while

Squirrel and Hedgehog is more action oriented, with a more elaborate plot. Besides, the political message is much subtler in *Squirrel and Hedgehog*. For one, no actual countries are mentioned in the show, only animal species. And also, the events on it do not directly mirror real life events like in *Der Fuehrer's Face*. Unlike in the cartoon, no country is trying to take over North Korea. However, the fact that the political message is subtle does not mean it does not exist. A child can watch an episode of the cartoon with the violent wolves and the loyal and obedient squirrels, and then watch the (government controlled) news and see a report about the degeneracy of American society and the good hard-working Koreans and link both concepts together. The show does not directly plant ideas on the mind, but it creates a ground for them. The Donald Duck cartoon is much blunter when it comes to its content, clearly establishing the Nazis as evil and dumb and life in America as great. The short is not precisely deep in its message, but that is not really needed, since that is not its purpose. At that point in the war, Americans did not need to be told that Nazis were evil, they were perfectly aware of that thanks to other, more serious, propaganda work, so the short focuses more on its comedy and animation than on having a particularly powerful message. Of course, this does not mean the short has no purpose. By offering Americans a chance to laugh at their enemy, it helps raise the moral of the country and to relax during the tense wartime, and also to make the Nazis seem less threatening, and thus the American army more competent. While most of the cartoon is focused on the Nazis, it still helps Americans feel better about their country simply by means of contrast.

Speaking of the representations of the enemy, it is interesting to note that *Squirrel and Hedgehog's* depiction is fairer to the enemy than what is usually seen in propaganda. Of course, they are still villainous, but they are portrayed as more rounded characters than the Nazis in the *Der Fuehrer's Face*, which are basically a joke. This could respond to two reasons, an ideological one and a practical one. The ideological reason would be the need to depict the enemy as something to be feared. By presenting the enemy wolves as physically strong and violent, and in the case of their

commander even somewhat cunning, it makes Geumsaegi seem more heroic when he thwarts them, and by extension it makes America seem like an all-powerful nation that still struggles against North Korea in the eyes of the audience. The practical reason would be that, due to it being a long running cartoon with an overarching plot, making the characters too one-dimensional would hurt its quality, while that is not a problem with *Der Fuehrer's Face* which is an eight minute short. Apart from this, the entire purpose of *Der Fuehrer's Face* is to make fun of the Nazis, which is why they are depicted in a mocking way, while the purpose of *Squirrel and Hedgehog* is to show the strengths and good qualities of the heroes, which is why their enemies are depicted more seriously, since it would be hard to take seriously a hero if the villains he defeats are simply jokes.

Lastly, I would like to take a more technical approach in this comparison by contrasting the cartoons in non-ideological matters, like the use of music, the animation style, etcetera. As previously mentioned, being on air since the seventies, *Squirrel and Hedgehog* uses a myriad of animation techniques during its run. The episode most of this essay has focused on, episode 31, uses modern animation techniques. The characters are drawn and colored digitally, and likely animated using Flash or a similar software, but the backgrounds are hand drawn. Some of the techniques used indicate its status as a rather low-budget production. For example, the use of 3D models to animate vehicles, the recycling of shots and animations (for example, seen in the scene where the wolves dive under the jeep during their training, all four wolves use the exact same animation), and the rather poor quality of the lip-synching. Despite these monetary concerns, the animation is mostly competent. As I mentioned previously, the villain characters are animated in a more expressive way than the main characters, since from a North Korean point of view excessive showing off is considered an undesirable quality. Even though the animation of *Squirrel and Hedgehog* is decent, *Der Fuehrer's Face's* animation is much better done, having been done by professionals of the medium. Being made in 1943, it is obviously entirely hand drawn, and all the characters are animated in a very “cartoony” way, that is with lots of very expressive and exaggerated movements.

As a comedy short, these exaggerated movements help enhance the humor of the situations in it, and as mentioned previously the exaggerated proportions of the Nazi characters help make them look more ridiculous.

Regarding the use of music, *Squirrel and Hedgehog* uses a cheerful melody for both its intro and outro, to give it a more child-friendly tone, but the music in the show itself is much more serious. The song that plays in the scene where Geumsaegi is driving around the wolves' camp is very militaristic and patriotic in nature and sounds somewhat out of place in what is supposed to be a children's cartoon, seeming more suited to a military parade. The song's lyrics are about the pacific nature of Flower Hill and the way its inhabitants would sacrifice themselves for it in case of attack. It is rather easy to interpret this song as being about North Korea, which paints a disturbing picture in that its inhabitants are told since children that they should be willing to die for their country if necessary. In contrast, the title song in *Der Fuehrer's Face* also has a militaristic tone, but considering its lyrics and the fact that it is shown to be played by a caricaturized band of Nazis, it is easy to see it as a parody of such militaristic marches, and the Nazi regime's reliance on them. This way, the music is used as another element of the short's general parody of the Nazis. It also fits the general tone of the short. The music becomes more dissonant and deranged when Donald starts hallucinating, and then more calm and relaxing when he wakes up safe in America (except for a little sting the music does when Donald sees the shadow on the wall). While *Squirrel and Hedgehog* uses music to strengthen its propagandistic nature, *Der Fuehrer's Face* uses it in a parodic way and to complement the mood of certain scenes.

6.- Conclusion

This essay has analyzed two pieces of animated propaganda: one made in America, during World War II, the other made in North Korea, on the present day. The contexts of both could not be any more different. However, they both can be easily identified as propaganda. Why is this? What does

exactly make something to be propaganda?

A propaganda piece is, essentially, a commercial. It is trying to convince its audience of something, to prove a point. But while a commercial is trying to sell a product, propaganda tries to create ideals, to raise a country's moral or to demonize a group of people. And much like in commercials, the “product” that is being sold has its positive qualities exaggerated, and its negative qualities understated or turned into assets.

This can be seen with the portrayal of the United States in both shorts. In the American *Der Fuehrer's Face*, Donald's typical American hot-bloodedness is seen as a positive quality, as a rebellion against the Nazi regime's conformity and stiffness of its repetitive work. By contrast, in *Squirrel and Hedgehog* the wolves' hot blood is seen as a sign of low intelligence, opposed to the calmer demeanor of the main character. *Der Fuehrer's Face* criticizes the Nazis' obsession with symbolism and their cult of personality, with the swastika-filled town, and the constant salutes to Hitler portraits. However, it presents Donald's room decorated with the American flag and a Lady Liberty figure as a safe, welcoming place, showing that symbols are only a problem when the enemy relies on them, and presenting one's own symbols as something to cherish.

To sum up, propaganda is meant to reach an audience as wide as possible, and the medium of animation works perfectly for this purpose since it can be attractive for a lot of people, including children. Both of these productions use the tricks and techniques of animation for great effect, to ridicule the Nazis in one and to praise the North Korean lifestyle in the other. But another thing that separates animated propaganda from its live action equivalent is its quality besides its propagandistic nature. If a contemporary spectator tried to watch a propaganda film from World War II, or a live action North Korean movie, they would be most likely bored half through it. However, these animated propaganda pieces are still enjoyable in a way. *Der Fuehrer's Face* is still a very funny cartoon, even disregarding the World War II setting, it is creative and funny enough that can still be watched today as a slapstick cartoon. And *Squirrel and Hedgehog*, while it may

result strange due to being a North Korean production, is still a decent action cartoon, with a somewhat engaging plot and good action scenes. While it is obvious that the animators and writers are pressured to include pro-North Korean messages in the show, it is also apparent that they wanted to create a good product. Even when creating content meant to push political ideals, animation allows for creativity and artistic merit to flourish. And in turn, this makes the push for these ideals more effective.

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