

Fantasy: the human strategy to escape life realities term papers examples

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The Secret life by Walter Mitty is a humor short story by James Thurber concerning the people`s state of mind and the social reality facing them in life. By using an American context, Thurber shows how ordinary citizen`s especially during the Great Depression escaped realities by turning to Hollywood movies, and inflated imagination to escape the harsh realities that the world had to offer during these hard times. These period was characterized by a not-so-easy life where poverty, high prices of commodities and standards of living pushed the average middle-class Americans to the edge of their lives (Kaufman, p93). By painting the picture of an American man Walter Mitty, and his overbearing wife Mrs. Mitty, Thurber narrates the story of Walter Mitty who drifts into worlds full of heroism, romance and passion through his creative imagination. Evidently faced by the common problems and dull life faced by every American during this era of the Great depression, Walter Mitty`s fantasies are narrated in the novel as his only channel to escape the harsh realities of life in addition to satisfying his inner-most feelings concerning the person he sees himself to be.

The short story revolves around Walter Mitty`s five dreams, which are portrayed as his secretive escape from a World that has little to offer him in terms of happiness and inner satisfaction. Pictured as a clumsy character who cannot even drive a car carefully as a result of his deep imagination that seems to fully absorb his senses, Mrs. Witty appears to be the perfect spouse for such a character as she is hard-mettled and bossy. She is the one character that reminds Walter Mitty that he has to experience and face the realities of the world no matter how harsh they appear to be (Terry, p1). His

dreams serve as comic relief to the audience as we are taken through a different transformation of character to a Walter Mitty who is fearless, heroic, brainy and even shrewd in his dreams. This gives us insight to the man Walter Mitty considers himself to be, despite his real being in reality being a direct opposite of the characters he fits himself to be (Shu, p94). As opposed to the 'fantasy Walter' the real Walter is a cautious man who is even cowardly to some extents. He is also a clumsy man whose wife seems to make all the important decision in their lives. The fantasies of Walter Mitty therefore truly serve as his escape channel to a world that he feels most appropriate in (Kaufman, p93). It is in this fantasy world of Walter Mitty that the character figures out how the world ought to view him and consider him, as opposed to what really happens in reality.

The novel rolls-out all of Walter Mitty`s dreams in a sequence from his short trip to the hairdresser`s with his wife and the period while waiting for his wife to get through with the hairdressing (Thurber, p54). In an ingenious fashion, the author synchronizes each of Walter Mitty`s dreams in relation to the current actions that he was performing (Shu, p94). As Mitty is driving his wife to the hairdresser, he drifts into a wild fantasy of a heroic character of himself as a British Pilot who has sacrificed his life in a suicidal mission to bomb a German ammunition arsenal. He encounters a deathly storm through which he exuberates exceptionalism and dexterity in navigating the plane, with all the crew showing great trust under his navigation. He is awakened from his dreamy world by his wife`s shrills that he is driving too fast (Terry, p4). When he passes a hospital the same short journey, he pictures himself as an important surgeon who performs one of the most complex pioneering

operations to save the life of one important person in the society, a millionaire banker (Thurber, p 63). This dream is however cut short by when he is jolted by a garage attendant who had been observing him deep in thought. The next dream is triggered when he hears the mention of the Waterbury trial. This fantasy drives him into the courtroom as a murder suspect, where in monotone he boasts of his skillful shooting skills. In the other dream, he sees himself as a general in war fighting the Germans, after reading news on the World War in the newspapers. Finally, the last dream involves Mitty as a hero awaiting his death bravely before a firing squad (Shu, p94).

These dreams above are enough indication of Walter Mitty`s urge to be a significant person in the society. Leading a dull-boring life, Mitty dreams of a world where his presence is felt among the people as someone important in the society (Kaufman, p93). In the real society he is a ‘ nobody’ who does not arouse attention wherever he goes. He is even constantly scolded by his wife owing to his perceived shortcomings, especially his inept lack of skills and laxity in doing errands (Terry, p1). His frequent drift into dreams is also a channel through which Mitty metes out his anger against the world for the person he has turned out to be (or rather what he is viewed in the world), these dreams also express violence, which may be taken to be the intrinsic desire to wage revenge upon his cruel wife(Shu, p94).

Thurber presents Mitty as a character who is experiencing extreme levels of neurosis, and thus his intense level of fantasies and day dreams. Mitty is not appropriately equipped to deal with the harsh situations of life. Instead he withdraws into his own self-created world where he views thing according to

his preferences. He does not accept life as it really is where he should improve on his character and abilities. Some of his shortcomings such as his inept attitude to perform mechanical tasks only weigh him down further, aggravated by the incessant nagging and condemnation from his wife (Terry, p5). The author however does not want us to sympathize with this condition of Walter Mitty. Mitty is such is presented as a character that should use resources to outlive his conditions and overcome his outlook to the society. The story of Walter Mitty is therefore one that uses humor to reflect on the life of people in the general society. Thurber in his book does not only focus on fictional characters, but the common life of the common man in the society today. Faced by harsh realities and strains of all sorts streaming from personal relationships, self-esteem, general outlook in the society, harsh economic times among many others, humans often resort to escapist methods to satisfy their emotional wants and exist in forms that they always envision themselves to be (Shu, p94).

Thurber therefore employs the use of humor to expose this human tendency to approach problems and harsh realities in life from a withdrawal approach instead of approaching these problems from a realistic and optimistic point of view. It is therefore important to look deeper into Thurber`s use of humor as a means of exposing human weaknesses when faced with problems that go against their will and expectations. The Secret Life of Walter Mitty is therefore a classic short story that shows how humans should tackle problems in their life.

Works Cited

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