

The secret life of walter mitty: comparing the short story with the movie

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The Secret Life of Walter Mitty: Short Story vs. Film

In 1939, James Thurber wrote a captivating story entitled *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*. 74 years later, in 2013, Thurber's legacy was continued when the short story was adapted into a Hollywood film. The theme of the story of Walter Mitty remained the same, however, there were a few major additions and cuts to the plot, and to the character base. These changes were made to make Mitty's story more interesting to the common person in 2013, and arguably made the plot more interesting.

In the short story, Walter is married to who we know as Mrs. Mitty. Their relationship appears to be strained at some times, for example when Mrs. Mitty criticises Walter for the way he did his errands. It appears that his failing relationship with Mrs. Mitty is one of the reasons that Walter spends much of his time daydreaming; to escape his wife's constant nagging. In the movie adaptation however, Walter is single. Throughout the movie he pursues a woman he works with; Cheryl Melhoff. In the same way, Cheryl is one of the causes of Walter's chronic daydreaming; for example, when he daydreams about saving Cheryl and her dog from a burning apartment building. The filmmakers likely changed this element in the story in order to make the movie appeal more to the common person in 2013, and to thicken the plot. While Walter's relation to his love interest differs from the story to the film, their roles in the story remain the same; to fuel Walter's daydreams.

While there are many differences from the short story to the film, the overall integrity of the plot remains intact. The most important aspect of the story: Walter's daydreaming is a large aspect of both the film and the short story. Walter often gets caught daydreaming about what kind of person he wishes to become. For example; in Thurber's short story, Walter wishes he were more important. As a result, he daydreams of being the centre of attention; as a specialist surgeon, operating on a millionaire banker; as a sharpshooter, on trial for murder; and several more occasions where he dreams that he is the hero. In the film, Walter wishes that he were bolder, and not afraid of anything. As a result of this, he dreams of himself standing up to his boss, and talking to the woman he desires. In both the film, and the movie, Mitty daydreams constantly to escape his reality, in which he leads a boring and unimportant life.

Walter's daydreaming habits are similar in both the movie and the film, however, what Walter does about his aspirations to become like he imagines himself differ in the film and short story. In the story, Walter's dreams are just that: dreams. He never acts on his desires to be a different person. In the movie however, Walter takes his fate into his own hands and acts on his yearnings. Mitty goes from daydreaming to going on a wild trip to Greenland, climbing a mountain, getting the girl he always wanted, appearing on the cover of Life magazine, and doing other things most people would only dream of doing. This is likely added to the plot in order to lengthen the movie, and to add a happy ending for Walter, which most moviegoers would expect to see.

The Secret Life of Walter Mitty maintains the same theme in both the film and the short story; which is Walter's daydreaming. However, the film directors did exclude Mrs. Mitty in favour of a new love interest for Walter, and included an adventure for him as well. These changes make the movie more exciting, and appeal more to the average viewer. Walter Mitty's story is a timeless classic, in both story and film form, and will likely be enjoyed for a long time to come, and may even be adapted again, with another set of additions and cuts to the plot.