

# English literature, the secret life of sir walter mitty-james thurber

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Secret Life of Walter Mitty- James Thurber By P. Baburaj, Senior Lecturer, Dept. of English, Sherubtse college, Bhutan Author of: Language and writing, DSB Publication Thimphu Communicative English, P. K. Books, Calicut A perception on Literary Criticism, P. K. Books, Calicut -A popular American writer, humourist and cartoonist. -A classical story. -Traditional realistic fiction. -A third person narration. Mixture of fantasy and realism. -Can be called a best example of magical realism. -Explores the concept of the “ American Dream”. -Introduces an average American male namely Mr. Mitty. Average Americans try to escape from the world of reality and “ try to live in the world of fantasy”. To make life a successful one, one should keep a balance between reality and fantasy. It is difficult to live always in the world of reality and also it will be impracticable to fly always from the world of reality and resort always there in fantasy.

As Robert Frost said in his eminent poem “ Birches” one should be a swinger of the Birches therefore keep balance between reality and fantasy. Otherwise life will be painful and will be a total failure. Daydreams are equal to Mitty, Mitty escapes from his mundane life (dull and uninteresting) by resorting to elaborate fantasies. The name Walter Mitty has become synonymous for day dreams. Mitty becomes a symbol for a person who enriches his private life with dynamic day dreams while working or while listening to every day conversations. Story focuses on escapism from mundane life into the world of fantasies.

The theme of success and failures in life is examined through Mitty's inability to live an external life, which results in going back to an internal life

full of dangers and heroism. -Stereotypical male and female roles. Mrs. Mitty appears as a practical woman (women are more practical than men in America). This aspect of women's character is established in the story. Man has become weak ineffectual and overly in aggressive. 1. Five day dreams of Mitty. 1. In the first day dream, which comes in the outset of the story Mitty is presented as the Pilot of US navy hydroplane. 2.

In the Second day dream, Mitty is a wonderful doctor performing a serious surgery (appears as a world famous author of a medical book titled "Streptothricosis"). -An expert mechanic to solve any problem within no time. -Even not worried when he hears from the team of doctors that „ A coreopsis? is formed on Mr. McMillan the patient. 3. In the third day dream Mitty is presented as a sharp shooter, a cool assassin, a convict who faces a great trail. 4. In the fourth day dream, Mitty is presented as a Royal Air force pilot -volunteering for a suicide mission to the ammunition dump and proudly says ?

We have only one life?. 5 In the fifth day dream, Mitty is presented as an eminent soldier fearlessly facing a firing squad -inscrutable, disdain and proud to the last. 2. -Five triggers that stimulate Mr. Mitty. 1. Mitty's speed of the car above 55 km/phr. 2. Mrs. Mitty's reference about Dr. Renshaw; hospital, Mrs. Mitty's enquiry about „? gloves??. 3. Newspaper boy shouting at the top of his voice about the water Bury trail. 4. " Liberty" magazine with glossy pictures of war. 5. Smoke goes up from the cigarette. 3. Mitty brought back into reality by 1. His wife's timely intervene when Mr.

Mitty was driving his car above 55km/phr speed (Mitty was in hydroplane). 2. Parking -lot attendant warns Mitty when he is driving his car in wrong lane (Mitty was imagining he is a great doctor). 3. Sudden remembrance of “Puppy biscuits” (Mitty was in the imaginary scene of trail). 4. Mitty is brought back by his wife (Mitty imagines that he is a member of a suicide squad). Mitty with his wings of fantasy moves in the realms of fantasy-story ends here, story begins and ends in fantasy, so Mitty appears as an unchanged character. By P. Baburaj, Senior Lecturer, Dept. of English, Sherubtse college, Bhutan

Mitty is presented as an ineffectual person criticized and rebuked by others, he feels he is insulted by his inability to do things properly. His Failures in everyday life is just opposed by the extraordinary successes he plays out in his world of fantasy. His failure in real life and success in the world of fantasy are closely connected with gender role (sex roles) in modern America. The story reveals the lack of opportunities for men to perform meaningful, heroic actions in modern, suburban, middle class America. Men in modern America become weak and ineffectual in front of overly aggressive women.

By the characterization of Mitty, James Thurber tries to criticize and mock the modern western ladies who dominate their husband in every walk of life. MITTY IN FANTASY v/sMitty in the world of reality. -He is a hero /heroic in action -Noble in action -Imaginative - An escapist -Man of forgetfulness - Weak/meek. -A superman /An extreme risk taker. -He always feels inferior. - Lacks competency -A man of decision. - Dependent. -A resourceful person. - feels sorry for everything. -Absent minded. -Giving orders. -Man of indecision

waiting for orders. -Aware everything. -Even unable to park a car properly/chain properly. poor memory. -Not practical -Independent/ Never listens to others -Never mind the consequence. By P. Baburaj, Senior Lecturer, Dept. of English, Sherubtse college, Bhutan . -Powerful in flying Hydroplane. -Great author. - a great mechanic finds out fault within no time. -Bold in admitting. -Man of truthfulness. -A patriot ready to sacrifice his life for the sake of his country. -The theme of success and failure in life is evaluated through Mitty? s inability to live a successful material life, which results him to retreat to a life of fantasy full of images of conquests. Mitty is portrayed as an unaffected rebuked by others -He feels insulted by his inability to do things properly. -The failure of his everyday life is just opposed by the extraordinary success he plays in his fantasy life. -In reality Mitty is a man of poor or limited achievement. Mrs. Mitty -Always bully her husband. - Dominating wife. -Worried about Mitty? shealthand even notices the small changes. -Always appear as an adviser. -Responsible wife. -Aggressive and short tempered. -Behaves in a rough and merciless manner. Climax -no climax, or no particular climax. since story presents with a story within the story no clear beginning or end. By P. Baburaj, Senior Lecturer, Dept. of English, Sherubtse college, Bhutan -action slowly rises and slowly falls throughout. -no change in Mitty? s character. -Mrs. Mitty is Mr. Mitty? s link to reality. She helps Mitty to avoid losing his grasp of everyday life. -Mitty? s day dreams are harmless but when he awakens he finds himself in anawkward position and finds difficulty to adjust with the reality. Conflicts Internal -Mitty in the real world V/s Mitty in the world of fantasy. External - Mitty v/s his wife. Mitty v/s society (especially his struggles to follow

conventional social norms). Fantasy: -eightengined hydroplane is used in the first fantasy by Mitty. In utmost care of class 12 by P Baburaj -in the first fantasy , Mrs. Mitty complains about the speed of the car. -crew members expresses Mitty as great and brave and not afraid of hell (death). -Car was in 55km/hr speed. I -Mrs. Mitty went to do her hair done during Mitty? s second fantasy. -patient in second fantasy- Millionaire Wellington McMillan, the great Banker and friend of Roosevelt, famous American president. -team of doctors headed by Dr. Mitty -Dr.

Renshaw, Dr. Benbow, Dr. Remington, and Dr. Pritchard Mitford. -Dr. Pritchard Mitford appreciates Mitty for his book on Streptothricosis. -Mitty puts a fountain pen instead of a faulty piston in order to repair the anaesthetizer. - Webley-Vickcrs 50-80 -the brand name of Mitty? s gun in the third fantasy. By P. Baburaj, Senior Lecturer, Dept. of English, Sherubtse college, Bhutan Meanings -Mitty- means -an ordinary, often an ineffectual person who indulges in fantastic day dream of personal triumphs. -Walt- someone who has aspiration to become a soldier, but posses none of the necessary personal qualities. Cocky- to be proud of one self. -A&P- name of a chain of grocery stores. Aupres de Ma Blonde- a song popular among the soldiers in world war I. -Cannonading -continuous firing of cannons. - Carburundum -a trade mark of abrasive chemical not something Mitty would actually need. -Obstreosis of the dual tract; meaningless medical Jargon invented by Mitty. -Streptothricosis- a sore on the skin, title of Mitty? s Book, medical Jargon misused by Mitty. -Overshoes -the shoes worn over another for protection. “ I am going to take your temperature?? Mrs.

Mitty implies that she is going to give a lesson after reaching home-this shows that Mrs. Mitty is a dominating and all powerful wife taking control over Mr. Mitty. -,, To hell with the handkerchief ? -the courage of Mitty even in the face of great danger, he is powerful enough to face any firing squad without covering his face with his handkerchief. -Inscrutable to the last-it means in this context the mysterious nature of Mr. Mitty, real meaning is- it cannot be understood or known fully till the end. By P. Baburaj, Senior Lecturer, Dept. of English, Sherubtse college, Bhutan \*\*\*\*\*