

# Comparing literature



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In literature, whether poems, short stories, or dramas, a theme is created. ? Writers will use content, form, and style to communicate this theme. ? This comparative essay will demonstrate how the writers of two pieces of literature communicate their themes. ? Thurber??™s ??? The Secret Life of Walter Mitty,??? and Bernard??™s ??? I??™m Going,??? will be compared relative to their representation of gender roles. ? ??? Gender roles are common and well-integrated into American society (Bauer & Sandstrom, 2011).??? ??? The Secret Life of Walter Mitty??? humorously shows how a man and woman argue on a daily basis. ? ??? I??™m Going??? also shows this arguing but in play form. ? Both pieces of literature communicate the constant theme of what is expected of a man and woman in society.

? Content, form, and style of both will be analyzed to see how it was used to develop this common theme. ? In analyzing Thurber??™s ??? The Secret Life of Walter Mitty,??? it is obvious that Mrs. Mitty nags Walter. ? For example, in this line, ???” Youre tensed up again,” said Mrs.

Mitty.??? Its one of your days. I wish youd let Dr. Renshaw look you over??? (as cited in Clugston, 2010), Mrs.

Mitty is telling Walter he should go to the doctor. ? This is one of the many times she tells him what to do. ? Thurber satirizes Mrs. Mitty on several occasions as well. ? For example, in the line, ??? You know I dont like to go more than forty??? (as cited in Clugston, 2010), she is telling Walter how she doesn??™t like to go fast.

? However, forty is an exaggeratingly slow speed. ? This can go on to show how men are more aggressive drivers. ? For example, “ for every 100

recorded female deaths due to transport accidents, there were 266 male deaths??? (Flanagan, 2009). ? Walter, based upon his outlandish dreams, wanted to be a risk taker.

? He wanted to be more than the weaker character he was. ? The theme in a story is a representation of the idea behind the story (Clugston, 2010). ? In ??? The Secret Life of Walter Mitty,??? the theme seemed to be a man escaping reality to get away from his nagging wife and do what he dreams of doing.

? Walter Mitty is constantly day dreaming of these unlikely occasions where he is the hero. ? This may be because of the way his wife treats him like he is insignificant and incapable. ? ??? I??™ m Going??? is the same in that the female in the play is nagging at the male. ? In ??? I??™ m Going,??? Jeanne is fussing at Henri for leaving to go to races while she stays at home alone. ? Both pieces of literature are so life-like it is hilarious. ? Both show real life situations in humorous form. ? While Walter dreams of a life he doesn??™ t have and can??™ t seem to please his wife, it happens in everyday life. ? ??? I??™ m Going??? shows the same thing except here, Henri wants to go to the races.

? As stated by Scott Andrews, ??? men need private time, to unwind, to engage in sports and hobbies, and to spend time with other men??? (Andrews, 2011). As seen here at the end, ??? Henri: Dear girl! (He rises)? Well, now for the races! (He takes the opera-glasses and hat and goes to the door at the right as he looks at Jeanne with an air of tenderness)? Good-bye, dearest! (He goes out) Jeanne: (Waits for a moment,

listens, and hears the outer door close, then rises, and goes to the door at the back. She speaks to someone off-stage)? Marie, dont go before you get me a large cup of chocolate. Bring two rolls, too. Oh, and go at once to my room and bring me my box of ribbons and those old hats.

(She comes down-stage, and says beaming)? What fun Ill have trimming hats!??? Jeanne was planning to go out regardless. ? She just wanted to argue. ? In order for Thurber to communicate the gender role based theme, he used several different elements. ? Thurber applied tone, symbolism, an appropriate setting, and a third person point of view. ? The tone throughout ??? The Secret Life of Walter Mitty??? was humorous and satirical. ? Thurber was able to communicate the way a husband and wife argue while using humorous situations. ? For example, in the line “ Hmm” said Walter Mitty.

He looked at his wife, in the seat beside him, with shocked astonishment. She seemed grossly unfamiliar, like a strange woman who had yelled at him in a crowd,??? (as cited in Clugston, 2010) he is able to show how Walter Mitty??™s wife is yelling at him but he is not really paying attention and does not recognize her. ? ? This is humorous but satirical in the fact that it is also making fun of Mrs. Mitty. ? ? Symbolism is also used by Thurber in order to help communicate the theme of gender roles more subconsciously. ? In the line ??? The next time, he thought, Ill wear my right arm in a sling; they wont grin at me then. Ill have my right arm in a sling and theyll see I couldnt possibly take the chains off myself,??? (as cited in Clugston, 2010) we are showed a more proud, I can do it myself Walter Mitty. ? This also

communicates the thought that men should take care of the more physical ??? hard??? work.

? In 1939, when this short story was written, women weren't expected or even wanted in the workplace. ? As seen here, married women who worked faced particular hostility. ??? A 1936 poll in Fortune? magazine asked, " Do you believe that married women should have a full time job outside the home" Only 15 percent of the respondents approved, while 48 percent disapproved, with the remaining 37 percent giving it conditional approval??? (Ware, 1982). ? Mrs. Mitty was going to get her hair done. ? This seems often a pass time for women. ? As research shows, a woman will spend the equivalent of just under two years of her life washing, styling, cutting, coloring, crimping and straightening her locks in salons or at home (2006).

? Walter however, is going to a garage to get his car worked on. ? This is something a man usually handles. ? In his dreams, his jobs were, for at that time in history, considered masculine i. e. Lawyer, doctor, pilot.

? All aspects of the setting in fact communicated the roles in which both genders are almost expected to behave. ? In Thurber's ??? The Secret Life of Walter Mitty,??? we also are communicated the gender based roles through a third person limited omniscient point of view. ? Thurber places the audience into the mind of Walter Mitty. ? In using this point of view, the audience is able to see what is going on in Walter Mitty's head.

? The audience can visualize the dreams and interpret what is being communicated. ? The audience is able to see Walter Mitty's reactions to different people's behavior. ? For example, ??? They're so damn cocky,

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thought Walter Mitty,??? (as cited in Clugston, 2010) this is in response to the man working at the garage and his expertise in parking Mr.

Mitty??™s car. ? As far as gender roles, it shows his frustration in having to almost feel as a weaker man in his abilities. ? It is damaging to his ego. ?  
 ? In comparison, Tristan Bernard communicated this same gender roles based theme, but in another way. ? Bernard applied tone, symbolism, an appropriate setting, but in play form. ? Bernard??™s tone is in ??? I??™m Going???, like Thurber??™s is humorous and satirical. ? In the line, Henri: Because the weather was bad. In any event, I have to buy a lady's ticket for you ??” ten francs! Personally, I can't see the use in spending thirty francs ??” well, say twenty-five ??” for something that gives you no pleasure.

You've told me a hundred times you don't like horse-racing. And as for me, when I go with you, I don't have a good time. Jeanne: You are polite!  
 (Clugston, 2010) We see humor in Henri??™s attempt to go alone and Jeanne??™s response. ? It is satirical in that Henri is almost, himself, making fun of Jeanne when he say??™s, ??? when I go with you, I don??™t have a good time??? (Clugston, 2010). ? Jeanne??™s tone also implies that women get mad when they can??™t ??? tag along??? with their husbands.

? Henri??™s tone suggests that men often like to go places alone. ? Both of which are common conceptions when thinking of a man and woman??™s perspective. ? The symbolism Bernard uses to communicate Henri??™s attitude is very intriguing. ? When Henri says, ??? Weather is always the same: every Sunday it's superb until noon, then it's cloudy and a little rainy ??” or else there's a big thunderstorm. It's always that way when I want

to go to the races,?? communicates his ??? ill??? attitude in almost expecting Jeanne to want to go with him. ? This symbolism helps with the more humorous setting.

? ? It almost seems to show his good mood until noon when his wife decides to go with him. ? Also, the clock being broke seems to be a symbol. ? It almost communicates the thought of a broken relationship between Henri and Jeanne. ? In comparison too Thurber??™s use of symbolism, Bernard??™s seems to be vaguer in showing gender roles. ? Bernard??™s use of symbolism communicated the relationship status between Henri and Jeanne whereas we see more gender based symbolism in Thurber??™s writing.

? Bernard used a small well furnished apartment room with two chairs a coffee serving station in Paris during the present time as his setting (Clugston, 2010). ? In the setting, we see Jeanne sitting on a couch and Henri sitting on a chair to the right of her near the coffee serving station. ? Henri being on the right side can serve and symbolism but is also part of the setting. ? When speaking of its symbolic meaning in gender roles, ??? women are always on the left side of the man...it dates back to ancient times when the man needed to keep his right (sword hand) free to defend his bride??? (2008, ?¶ 63).

? However, the right side can also be considered the conservative side. ? This may also subconsciously convey that Henri is the more trustworthy ??? conservative??? character. ? Also, Jeane??™s location on the left could symbolize a woman??™s oppression during the 1915??™s.

? As stated by Foley, “ the cultural apparatus of the left in the thirties was, if anything, more firmly masculinist than its political institutions” (Foley, 1986). Moreover, Thurber’s setting seemed to show more distinctly a man and woman’s place in society, while Bernard chose to show a more vague subconscious setting. While plays do not have a point of view, Bernard’s play *I’m Going*, when read, seems that it could be third person omniscient point of view. The audience can read the emotions felt by both Henri and Jeanne. At times, Henri is described as being moved by something Jeanne has said or done and Jeanne is described tearfully. This point of view, like Thurber’s, helps the audience to connect and visualize each character’s emotions. We see Jeanne, emotionally, as the woman.

? Stereotypically in society, women are the more emotional sex. Likewise, psychologist Ann Kring states, it is incorrect to make a blanket statement that women are more emotional than men. “ It is correct to say that women show their emotions more than men.” (1998) Without any names being shown in this play, the audience could stereotypically decipher the man and woman. In Conclusion, both pieces of literature convey the message; there are different roles that each gender takes in society.

? Both pieces whether distinctly or subconsciously use different elements in literature to communicate this common theme. Thurber communicates his theme more distinctly and outspoken whereas Bernard takes a much more subtle approach. Both writers use tone, symbolism, setting, and point of view to effectively suggest an opinion about gender and roles, whether it be



their own or in fun. ? Satirical humor seems to be a common tone as well in both pieces.

? By using this tone, they are able to get and keep an audience??™s attention. ? Both pieces were very effective in conveying the message of gender in roles but in comparison did in a very clever but different way.