

author of the secret life of walter mitty

The author of *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* is James Thurber, a celebrated American cartoonist, author, and playwright. Born on December 8, 1894, in Columbus, Ohio, Thurber is best known for his unique blend of humor and insight into the complexities of human relationships and society. His work has left an indelible mark on American literature, particularly through his short stories that capture the absurdities of everyday life. This article delves into Thurber's life, his literary contributions, and the lasting impact of his most famous work, "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty."

James Thurber: A Brief Biography

James Thurber grew up in a large family in Columbus, Ohio. His father was a newspaper editor, and his mother was a homemaker, which influenced his early exposure to the world of storytelling and humor. Thurber's childhood was marked by a series of personal challenges, particularly after he suffered a serious eye injury during a childhood wrestling match. This injury would eventually lead to significant vision impairment, shaping not only his perspective but also his unique artistic style.

Thurber attended The Ohio State University but left before graduating to work for various newspapers, including the *Columbus Dispatch*. His career as a cartoonist began in the 1920s when he moved to New York City and became associated with the prestigious magazine, *The New Yorker*. His illustrations and writings quickly gained fame, establishing him as a prominent figure in American humor.

Career Highlights

Thurber's career spanned several decades, during which he produced a wealth of material that continues to resonate with audiences today. Key highlights of his career include:

- Cartoons and Illustrations:** Thurber's cartoons, characterized by their simplicity and wit, were published in numerous magazines. His style featured whimsical characters and often surreal situations that reflected the absurdities of modern life.
- Short Stories:** Thurber is perhaps best known for his short stories, many of which explore themes of fantasy, identity, and the contrast between reality and imagination. "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty," published in 1939, is a prime example of this.
- Plays and Adaptations:** In addition to his written work, Thurber adapted several of his stories into plays. One notable adaptation is "The Male Animal," which became a successful Broadway play in 1940.
- Notable Works:** Some other significant works by Thurber include "My Life and Hard Times," "The 13 Clocks," and "The Wonderful O." These works showcase his unique narrative style and ability to blend humor with poignant observations about life.

The Secret Life of Walter Mitty

Published in The New Yorker in 1939, "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty" is a short story that tells the tale of an ordinary man who escapes his mundane life through vivid daydreams. Mitty, the protagonist, is a timid man who fantasizes about heroism and adventure as a way to cope with his uneventful reality. This story has been interpreted in various ways, reflecting broader themes of escapism, identity, and the human experience.

Plot Overview

The story unfolds in a series of daydreams, with each fantasy showcasing Walter Mitty in various heroic roles:

- The Navy Pilot: Mitty imagines himself as a daring pilot navigating through a storm, showcasing his desire for adventure and bravery.
- The Surgeon: In another fantasy, he envisions himself as a skilled surgeon performing a complex operation, highlighting his yearning for respect and admiration.
- The Accused Criminal: Mitty dreams of being a man on trial, where he stands confidently against a judge, representing his desire for control and power.

As the story progresses, Mitty is jolted back to his reality, where he is often belittled and overshadowed by his domineering wife. The narrative structure allows readers to experience the stark contrast between Mitty's grand fantasies and his mundane existence, emphasizing the theme of escapism.

Thematic Elements

"The Secret Life of Walter Mitty" explores several themes that resonate with readers:

1. Escapism: Mitty's daydreams serve as a coping mechanism for his unfulfilled life, encouraging readers to reflect on their own desires for escape from routine.
2. Identity and Self-Perception: The story raises questions about how individuals perceive themselves versus how they are perceived by others. Mitty's fantasies provide him with a sense of identity that his real life does not.
3. The Absurdity of Life: Thurber's humor often highlights the absurdities of daily life. Mitty's interactions with others reveal societal expectations and the often comical nature of human relationships.
4. The Conflict Between Fantasy and Reality: The juxtaposition of Mitty's fantasies against his reality emphasizes the struggle many individuals face between their dreams and the limitations of their lives.

Impact and Legacy

James Thurber's contributions to literature, particularly through "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty," have had a lasting influence on both literature and popular culture. The story is not only a staple in American literary studies but has also inspired various adaptations:

- **Film Adaptations:** The story was adapted into a film in 1947, with a more straightforward narrative approach. A more recent adaptation in 2013, directed by Ben Stiller, expanded on the original premise, incorporating modern themes and visual effects that resonated with contemporary audiences.
- **Cultural References:** The character of Walter Mitty has become a cultural archetype for individuals who lead ordinary lives but harbor extraordinary dreams. The term "Mittyesque" is often used to describe someone who lives in a fantasy world, highlighting the story's influence on the English language.
- **Influence on Other Writers:** Thurber's blend of humor and serious themes has inspired a generation of writers. His ability to capture the human experience through wit and insight has left a lasting mark on American literature.

Conclusion

The author of *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*, James Thurber, remains a pivotal figure in American literature, known for his keen observations of human nature and society. Through his unique storytelling style, he invites readers to explore the complexities of identity, fantasy, and the everyday absurdities of life. "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty" continues to resonate with audiences today, serving as a reminder of the power of imagination and the universal desire to escape the confines of reality. Thurber's legacy endures, inspiring readers and writers alike to embrace their dreams and confront the realities of life with humor and grace.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who is the author of 'The Secret Life of Walter Mitty'?

The author is James Thurber.

What year was 'The Secret Life of Walter Mitty' published?

It was published in 1939.

What is the main theme of 'The Secret Life of Walter Mitty'?

The main theme is the contrast between the mundane reality of life and the rich inner life of imagination.

In what publication did 'The Secret Life of Walter Mitty' first appear?

It first appeared in 'The New Yorker'.

What genre does 'The Secret Life of Walter Mitty' fall under?

It falls under the genre of short fiction and satire.

What is the significance of Walter Mitty's character?

Walter Mitty represents the everyman who escapes his dull existence through vivid daydreams.

Has 'The Secret Life of Walter Mitty' been adapted into film?

Yes, it has been adapted into films, with notable versions released in 1947 and 2013.

Who directed the 2013 film adaptation of 'The Secret Life of Walter Mitty'?

The 2013 film was directed by Ben Stiller.

What is a famous quote from 'The Secret Life of Walter Mitty'?

'To be a hero, you have to be a little crazy.'

What is the significance of Walter Mitty's daydreams?

His daydreams symbolize the desire for adventure and the pursuit of a more meaningful life.

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