

“The Secret Life of Walter Mitty” – James Thurber

Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming

In 1908 Sigmund Freud presented a talk entitled "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" at the publisher Hugo Heller's offices...The condensed and theoretical nature of Freud's statements here summarize ideas he was to present elsewhere in his work.

He begins with an idea that Donald Winnicott would later take up concerning the link between childhood games and creation—in this case, literary creation. The game is defined as a "daydream" and extends into adolescence in "fantasies." Both belong to the more general category of fantasy activity, which is itself the result of unsatisfied desires. The link with literary creation takes place through popular literature, whose heroes are always victorious after they have undergone various trials. The pleasure of reading is defined as essentially narcissistic. The hero is always His Majesty the Ego and the "psychological" novel differs from the adventure novel only in that the ego is split into "partial egos" that are represented by the various heroes in conflict. The social novel, however, makes the ego an outside observer.

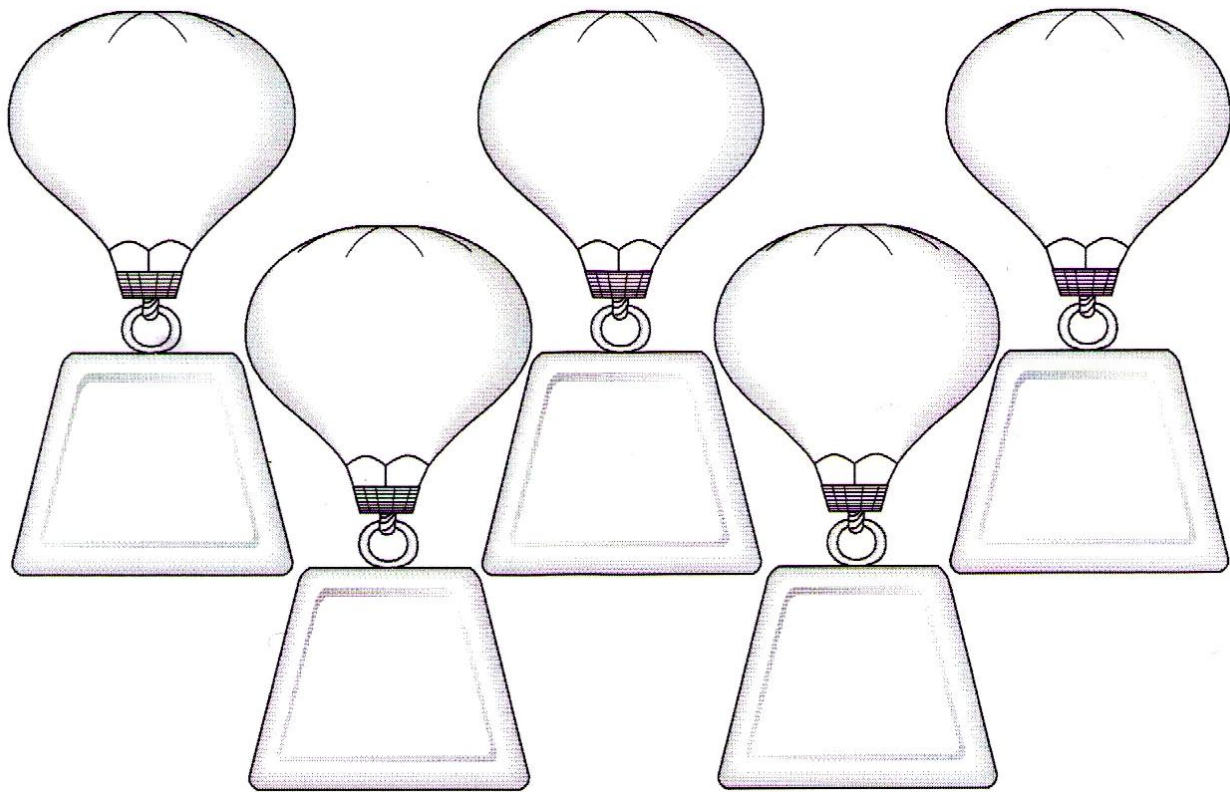
The novelist's literary capacity is supported through the echoes that real events or folkloric sources awaken in his or her childhood memory. The creator allows the reader to participate in his fantasy world through the formal techniques he exercises, which provide a source of pleasure. This frees a deeper source, enabling the reader to "enjoy his fantasies without scruple and without shame."

Source Citation: Freud, Sigmund. (1908e [1907]). Der Dichter und das Phantasieren. *Neue Revue*, 1, 716-724; Creative writers and daydreaming. *SE*, 9: 143-153. —SOPHIEDE MIJOLLA-MELLOR <http://www.answers.com/topic/creative-writers-and-day-dreaming>

TASK: with a partner, relate the following concepts from the above passage to “The Secret Life of Walter Mitty.”

Fantasy and unsatisfied desires.

The ID creating a heroic identity for the EGO



TASK:

1. In the balloons, write the five roles that Walter Mitty plays in his fantasies. In the weights below each balloon, describe the situation that occurs immediately after each fantasy to essentially pull Walter Mitty back to earth.
2. What is Mitty's real character like, in contrast to the characters in his fantasies? Focus also on how people treat him in and out of his fantasies.
3. What do you think is the significance of Mitty's final daydream? Why does the story end here?
4. In your opinion, does this story contain a traditional **climax** or **resolution**? Explain using examples (see p.38 for definitions of these terms)