

THE MEANING OF WALTER MITTY'S LIFE AS REFLECTED IN

“THE SECRET LIFE OF WALTER MITTY(2013)” MOVIE

Indra Pujianto

Sukarni Suryaningsih

ABSTRACT

The Secret life of Walter Mitty yang disutradarai oleh Ben Stiller adalah satu dari banyak film Amerika yang menggambarkan keadaan kehidupan sosial dan budaya di masyarakat Amerika. Film ini menceritakan tentang perjuangan dari karakter utama yang bernama Walter Mitty dalam mencapai arti hidupnya dan kehidupan bermaknanya. Tujuan dari skripsi ini adalah untuk mendeskripsikan atau menganalisa aspek intrinsik yang meliputi unsur narasi (tema, karakter, setting dan plot) dan sinematik (jarak kamera, *mise-en-scene* dan suara) pada film *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* dan untuk menjelaskan dan menganalisa aspek ekstrinsik yang meliputi kehidupan Walter Mitty dan perjuangannya dalam mencapai arti hidup dan kehidupan bermaknanya berdasarkan teori arti hidup yang disebut “*logotherapy*” yang ditemukan oleh Victor Emil Frankl. Penulis melakukan penelitian kepustakaan dalam mengumpulkan data. Untuk menganalisa unsur ekstrinsik dari film tersebut, penulis menggunakan pendekatan objektif dan pendekatan sosial-psikologi. Hasil dari skripsi adalah bahwa karakter utama dari film ini, Walter Mitty, berhasil melalui beberapa langkah dalam mencapai arti hidupnya dan ia benar-benar berjuang untuk mencapai kehidupan bermaknanya. Seperti yang terlihat pada film, kehidupan bermaknanya terlihat ketika ia mendapatkan apresiasi, kebahagiaan, dan cinta dari orang-orang yang mencintainya.

Kata kunci: perjuangan, arti hidup, kehidupan bermakna, *logotherapy*, sosial-psikologi, apresiasi, kebahagiaan, cinta

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

According to Warren and Wellek in their book *Theory of Literature*, “literature is a social institution, using as its medium language, a social creation” (1949 : 89). Therefore, it can be inferred that literature is always connected with society. Literary writer produces literary works that live in society as the expression of humans’ feelings and ideas. The

expression can be in the form of drama, novel, short story or poem. Film can be an adaptation of literary work, especially novel. And movie is produced by movie director.

Movie or film is one of literary works which delivers the story through motion pictures to the audiences audio-visually. Dr. Greg M. Smith states in his book *Film Structures and The Emotion System* :

For the purposes of this work, “film” is assumed to be a highly coordinated visual (and usually aural) medium that has developed a number of conventional strategies (shared by producers and consumers) for storytelling in uninterrupted real time (2003 : 20).

Movie has audio-visual element so that the viewers can watch the story and listen to the dialogues at once. In its relation with society, movie always corresponds to the society because the stories refer and depict the problems of people in the society, as it is stated by Graeme Turner in his book *Film as Social Practice*, “understanding a movie is not essentially an aesthetic practice; it is a social practice which mobilizes the full range of meaning systems within the culture” (Graeme, 1999 : 225).

The Secret Life of Walter Mitty (2013), a romantic adventure movie, is an interesting and inspirational movie. As it is shown from the title, the story of the movie truly focuses on the main character named Walter Mitty. This movie brings the audiences to Walter Mitty’s life and let them see his struggles in achieving his meaning of life and meaningful life through the journey that he did. From this movie, the writer found that there are valuable things which main character got such as great appreciation, love, happiness and changes of his attitude and behavior as the proofs that he finally learned the meaning of life which is influenced by social environment. Therefore, the writer entitles this thesis “The Meaning of Walter Mitty’s Life as Reflected in *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty (2013)* Movie”.

1.2 PURPOSES OF THE STUDY

The writer could determine the purposes of the study. There are two purposes of the study. The purposes of the study are to describe and analyze the intrinsic aspect in *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* (2013) movie and to explain and analyze the extrinsic aspect namely the meaning of Walter Mitty's life, the sources of his meaning of life and his struggles in achieving the meaningful life.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 METHOD OF THE STUDY

Method of the study explains where the information sources come from and how the writer collects the data needed in the thesis. To analyze the problems of the thesis, the writer employs two methods namely method of research and method of approach.

2.1.1 METHOD OF RESEARCH

In method of research, the writer uses library research method in gathering the data needed to support the analysis in this thesis. As it is explained by Mary W. George, "library research involves identifying and locating sources that provide factual information or personal/ expert opinion on a research question; necessary component of every other research method at some point." (George, 2008:6). The writer collects the data by watching the movie and looking for the reference books that are connected to the research and browsing the internet to get some information and articles related to the topic.

2.1.2 METHOD OF APPROACH

Method of approach is the method used to analyze the data obtained previously. In method of approach, the writer uses objective approach to analyze the intrinsic aspect and social-psychological approach to analyze the extrinsic aspect. Objective approach is an

approach that analyzes a literary work purely as literary work. It means that objective approach is not associated with the author's point of view. It is in line with the statement of M.H. Abrams in his book *A Glossary of Literary Term* about objective criticism. He states :

Objective criticism deals with a work of literature as something which stands free from what is often called an "extrinsic" relationship to the poet, or to the audience, or to the environing world. Instead it describes the literary product as a self-sufficient and autonomous object, or else as a world-in-itself, which is to be contemplated as its own end, and to be analyzed and judged solely by "intrinsic" criteria such as its complexity, coherence, equilibrium, integrity, and the interrelations of its component elements. (2008 : 63).

Objective approach digs out the intrinsic aspect of the literary work. As the object of this thesis is a movie, the intrinsic aspect covers narrative and cinematic elements.

Turning to the social-psychological approach, social-psychological approach used by the writer in this thesis will support the explanation of the topic taken. Social-psychological approach is an approach of science which studies the psychological aspects of human behaviour which is influenced by social interactions. Social interaction within group or outside group and internal factors within the human person can influence in changing the behaviour or forming a new behaviour of someone. As it is stated by William McDougall in Wendy Rogers' *Social Psychology – Experimental and Critical Approaches*, "social psychology should be recognized as the rightful domain in which to study 'the springs of human action, the impulses and motives that sustain mental and bodily activity and regulate conduct'" (McDougall, 2003 : 12). In this approach, the writer applies the theory of Meaning of Life called "Logotherapy" based on the book *Man's Search for Meaning* written by Victor E. Frankl to analyze the problems proposed by the writer in this thesis, those are the meaning of Walter Mitty's life, the sources of his meaning of life and his struggles in achieving the meaningful life as reflected in *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty (2013)* movie.

2.2 DISCUSSION

2.2.1 ANALYSIS OF INTRINSIC ASPECT

Intrinsic aspect is very essential to understand the movie well. It is because intrinsic aspect depicts the environment and condition of the movie. Therefore, if the viewers do not understand the environment and condition of the movie, there will be confusion in understanding the movie. Intrinsic aspect consists of two elements. Those are narrative and cinematic elements.

2.2.1.1 Analysis of Major Characters

2.2.1.1.1 Walter Mitty

Walter Mitty is categorized as a major and main character because he plays big role in the movie. From those picture above, it can be seen that Walter Mitty is portrayed as a forty two years old man who has wavy hair, pointed nose and blue eyes. In the movie, it is heard that has soft voice. He is still single. He is a hardworking man and also a breadwinner for his mother and sister. He really loves his mother and sister. However, he is a little bit careless. He works as a negative assets manager of LIFE magazine. As a negative assets manager, he is responsible to manage the negatives and process it into a photograph. He has a crush who is his coworker named Cheryl Melhoff, but he is not brave enough to talk with her. Sometimes, in the middle of his activities he is daydreaming himself who becomes an adventurous, brave, creative and heroic person.

2.2.1.1.2 Cheryl Melhoff

Cheryl Melhoff is also categorized as a major character because she has big influences although she does not play big role in the movie. In the movie Cheryl Melhoff is portrayed as a beautiful woman who has brown hair and blue eyes. She is a divorced woman who has a young son. She is a kind and helpful woman. She does not hesitate to talk and to give suggestions to Walter. Cheryl has big influences Walter. Undirectly, her supports have changed Walter into a better person.

2.2.1.2 Analysis of Minor Characters

2.2.1.2.1 Ted Hendrick

Ted Hendrick is a transition manager of LIFE magazine. He is responsible to handle the downsizing of LIFE magazine and the transition of LIFE magazine into LIFE online. Hendrick is portrayed as a young manager with wavy hair and thick beard. It is also shown from those pictures that he also wears formal outfit with vest and blazer very neatly which indicates that he is very exclusive and neat. In managing the transition of LIFE magazine, he leads the company annoyingly and boastfully.

2.2.1.2.2 Sean O'Connell

A photographer as well as photojournalist of LIFE whose photos are greatly appreciated. As a photojournalist, he works very hard and goes everywhere to capture photographs needed for LIFE magazine. He is a very calm, kind and friendly person. He is also very adventurous and also mysterious.

2.2.1.3 Analysis of Setting

Mostly, the setting of place seen in *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty (2013)* is taken in New York City. In New York City, actually there are some places which are also shown in the movie, they are Walter Mitty's house, LIFE building, the park, Edna Mitty's apartment and airport. In LIFE building, there is a room named negative asset room highlighted in the movie. It also depicts Greenland, Iceland, Afghanistan and Himalayas. The setting of time in *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty (2013)* is taken in modern era. The social environment setting in this movie shows the atmosphere of working people.

2.2.1.4 Analysis of Plot

The Secret Life of Walter Mitty (2013) begins with the scene of Walter Mitty who is hesitant to send a wink to Cheryl Melhoff. The rising action of this movie is indicated by the

missing of negative #25 which is needed for the cover of LIFE last print issue. The climax of the movie is when Walter arrives in New York after the journey to Greenland and Iceland that he took to find Sean, he suddenly is fired by Ted Hendrick. Falling action of the movie is when Walter finally found Sean and the negative #25. The resolution of this movie is when Walter and Cheryl are reunited. When they meet each other, Walter expresses his feeling to Cheryl.

2.2.1.5 Analysis of Conflict

In this movie, the internal conflicts happen when Walter is thinking to find the best way to overcome the problems, when he is facing two options, and when he is thinking of Cheryl that is illustrated eventually by his imagination. The external conflict of this movie happens between Walter Mitty and Ted Hendrick.

2.2.2 ANALYSIS OF EXTRINSIC ASPECT

2.2.2.1 The Meaning of Walter Mitty's Life

The writer analyzes the struggle of Walter Mitty, the main character of *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty (2013)* movie, in achieving the meaning of his life according to the concepts of the meaning of life theory proposed by Victor E. Frankl. To achieve the meaning of life, Walter Mitty is triggered by three values which come from himself and are called the sources of the meaning of life. Those values are creative values, experiential values and attitudinal values. Walter Mitty's creative values are indicated by him while doing creative activities such as working and doing something that he loves which gives advantages to him. The other source is experiential values.

Walter's experiential values are marked with his encounter and interaction with the other characters. By encountering and interacting with other characters, Walter gets motivation, support and love from the people around who love him. The last source is

attitudinal values. Walter's attitudinal values are marked when he accept his condition and gives response to the unvoidable events he experienced. By accepting his bitter condition and responding to an unvoidable event, Walter thinks positively what he should do in the future.

In achieving the meaning of his life, Walter Mitty passes three psychological concepts which form an interconnected link namely freedom of will, will to meaning and meaning of life. Freedom of will is expressed when he chooses to try to get closer to Cheryl Melhoff and to elude Ted Hendrick and try to to find Sean as well as the negative #25 by his own way. Walter's will to meaning is discovered by his concrete activity through action and interaction. Walter's will to meaning is expressed in the movie when he is willing to take a great journey in order to find Sean and the negative #25 and to get closer to Cheryl Melhoff.

Walter's meaning of life is indicated when he found that something he felt and he got is important and valuable. Walter's meaning of life is shown when he is looking for the negative #25. It is not only he believes that negative #25 is very important for fulfilling his responsibility as negative asset manager but also because negative #25 is his responsibility and his struggle to appreciate Sean's hardwork.

2.2.2.2 Walter Mitty's Meaningful Life

After struggling in giving meaning of his life, finally Walter found his meaningful life. Meaningful life is the positive result of his struggle in giving meaning of his life. In achieving his meaningful life, Walter passes five stages. The first stage is suffering stage, Walter's suffering stage is marked when Walter received an unpleasant experiences and decision from his boss. The next stage of his life in achieving the meaningful life is self-accepting stage. At this stage, Walter Mitty start to realize and understand his condition. The next stage which Walter experienced is meaning of life discovering stage. At this stage Walter start to set what he wants to do that he considers it is valuable to be the purpose of

life. Walter experiences meaning realization stage when he believes to do something that he set to be a purpose of life. One of his action which shows his meaning realization stage is when he tells his feeling honestly to Cheryl. Continue to the final stage, that is meaningful life stage. At this stage, Walter gains the result of his efforts, that is meaningful life.

His meaningful life is expressed from everything what he gets which is considered important and valuable for him such as a better life, love and happiness. It can be concluded that Walter successfully achieved his meaningful life; he got great appreciation, happiness, love from the people who love him.

3 CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis in *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* movie, the writer concludes that finally, Walter Mitty, successfully achieved the meaning of his life and his meaningful life in accordance with the concepts of the meaning of life which is called “logotherapy” theory proposed by Victor E. Frankl.

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