

Walter Mitty's Personality Transformation in The Secret Life of Walter Mitty (2013): Plato's Allegory Cave

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ABSTRACT

A movie directed by Ben Stiller, *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* (2013), offers a visually stunning narrative that has captivated audiences worldwide. This study examines the transformation of Walter Mitty's personality from the perspective of Plato's Allegory of the Cave. The research aims to explore how Walter's journey symbolizes the transition from illusion to self-discovery. Employing a qualitative method, this analysis focuses on narrative and visual elements that reflect the allegorical process of emerging from the "cave" of fantasy into meaningful reality. The data were collected by identifying relevant scenes and analyzing them using Plato's Allegory of the Cave theory. Walter Mitty's physical and mental transformation is central to his personal growth, demonstrating how the film explores the theme of self-discovery. Ultimately, *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* emphasizes the importance of stepping out of one's comfort zone to face reality, mirroring the process of breaking free from the cave to gain true knowledge.

Keywords: Transformation, Self-discovery, Allegory of the Cave

1. Introduction

(Solihah & Ahmadi, 2022)(Solihah & Ahmadi, 2022)(Solihah & Ahmadi, 2022)(Solihah & Ahmadi, 2022)(Solihah & Ahmadi, 2022)(Solihah & Ahmadi, 2022)(Solihah & Ahmadi, 2022)(Solihah & Ahmadi, 2022) In today's fast-paced and ever-changing world, many individuals feel trapped in routine, daydreaming, and a limited perception of themselves. Often people are hampered from reaching their maximum potential due to the phenomenon of self-limitation, both mentally and emotionally (Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, 1990). This is clearly seen in the struggle between living an ordinary life and seeking extraordinary experiences. The themes of personal transformation and the journey from the comfort zone to self-enlightenment strongly influence those who question their place in the world. This has long been a concern of writers and filmmakers, who explore the human condition through the lens of personally experienced change (Joseph Campbell, 1949). Many works discuss how individuals confront their fears and desires while exploring the conflict between reality and illusion. In literature and film, character development often involves a meaningful journey to discover one's identity, face challenges, and confront the truth about oneself and the world around them. As in the following study, literary works hide and reveal the hidden secrets within their characters, so that, unknowingly, they have changed their mindset and behavior (Syakira Nayla Azizah et al., 2023). This aligns with the understanding that literary works are expressions of human feelings, thoughts, and experiences, often depicting the struggles of individuals as they navigate between reality and

illusion (Solihah & Ahmadi, 2022). The gap in current literature lies in the limited application of Plato's Allegory of the Cave to film analysis, particularly about the character transformation of Walter Mitty in *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* (2013). Although many studies have explored themes such as personal growth, self-discovery, and the shift from fantasy to reality in the film, they do not fully address how these themes align with Plato's Allegory of the Cave. This allegorical framework speaks to human enlightenment and personal transformation and has not been sufficiently applied to understanding Walter Mitty's journey from escapism to a meaningful existence. Therefore, the problem is the absence of a philosophical perspective that can deepen the understanding of Walter Mitty's transformation.

Ben Stiller, the director of *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* (2013), is one of the filmmakers who delve into these themes. As both director and actor, Stiller often explores identity, self-worth, and the pursuit of happiness. In *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*, he vividly portrays characters trapped in routine, using daydreams as a temporary escape, only to embark on transformative real-life journeys (Ebert, 2013). The film *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* (2013) is a cinematic adaptation of James Thurber's short story of the same title. It tells the story of Walter Mitty, a middle-aged man who escapes his monotonous life through daydreams of thrilling adventures. However, when faced with a real-world crisis, Mitty embarks on a journey that leads to his transformation. This transition from fantasy to reality reflects the classic concept of Walter Mitty's journey, where the protagonist undergoes a shift in self-perception and embrace a more authentic existence. Walter Mitty is a man who spends most of his life within the confines of his mind, using fantasy as a means to escape his dull reality. As a photo editor at *Life* magazine, his days are filled with mundane tasks and limited social interaction. However, when the magazine faces closure, Mitty is assigned to locate a missing negative for its final cover. This task takes him on a physical and emotional journey that encourages him to face fears, make decisions, and ultimately achieve personal growth, as his character changes significantly in facing challenges. (James Monaco, 2009).

As Mitty embarks on adventures in the real world, he faces various challenges that push him out of his comfort zone. From climbing mountains in Iceland to jumping into the ocean and encountering a shark, his journey becomes a literal and symbolic rescue from the limitations that once held him back. Each step he takes teaches him more about himself, building his confidence and courage, and ultimately helping him realize that the life he once deemed ordinary holds extraordinary untapped potential.

Walter Mitty's transformation becomes the central focus of the film, and his journey aligns closely with the philosophy presented in Plato's Allegory of the Cave. In Plato's allegory, prisoners are trapped inside a cave, watching shadows on the wall, unaware of the true reality outside. The essence of Plato's Allegory of the Cave is a depiction of humans living in ignorance and the limitations of their perception. They are likened to prisoners in an underground cave, chained since childhood, able to see only shadows on the cave wall, which are merely reflections of objects displayed behind them by the light of a fire. These shadows are perceived as reality because they are all the prisoners know. However, when one manages to free themselves from the chains, they undergo a painful journey toward the light, eventually opening their eyes and minds to the ultimate truth. This allegory reflects the struggle to escape ignorance and achieve knowledge and enlightenment, despite the process being arduous and fraught with challenges. (University of Notre Dame, 2025). Mitty's journey reflects this concept, as he transitions from the shadows of his fantasies to enlightenment through real-world experiences. By stepping out of the "cave" of his illusions, he attains a higher understanding of himself and the world around him.

The film received positive responses from both audiences and critics. Viewers appreciated the film's emotional depth and visual beauty, particularly in portraying a man stepping out of his comfort zone to explore the unknown. Many saw the film as an inspiring message about the journey of self-discovery and the importance of seizing opportunities. For instance, several reviews on IMDb highlight the film's ability to connect with viewers emotionally. One review states, *"What the movie does brilliantly, is make the watcher feel connected to Walter Mitty and feels with him. You'll find him goofy, but likable. Your respect for him will grow with every minute, and at the end of the movie, you'll love him. Maybe you even recognize your own milestone moments, mountains you have climbed, seas you have sailed, so we all are bigger than we are perceived, as long as you have that respect and confidence from within."* Additionally, the cinematography, including the breathtaking landscapes of Iceland, was praised for enhancing Walter Mitty's transformative journey. The film's success was also reflected in its box office performance, with significant global earnings. Beyond its commercial achievements, *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* has become a cultural benchmark for discussions on personal growth and the importance of taking risks in the pursuit of happiness. The film inspires audiences to reflect on their own lives and to explore their potential by breaking free from their limitations, even if it means stepping into the unknown.

Previous studies on *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* show how this film depicts a journey from unproductive daydreaming to self-achievement through meaningful interactions with others that change perceptions of reality and encourage personal growth. (Ebert, 2013). Moreover, the film critiques societal norms, particularly American society in the 1930s, by exploring the tension between fantasy and everyday reality. It contrasts Walter's "sense of reality" with his "sense of possibility," underscoring the importance of social interaction and self-awareness in fostering change. (Chooper-White, 2014; De Menezes, 2020; Elizabeth Stallings, 2023; Karina Wahyu Rahmawati, 2018). These studies often use psychological theories or existential philosophies to analyze Mitty's development. However, while they effectively address aspects of character growth and personal development, these analyses often neglect the application of a specific philosophical lens, such as Plato's Allegory of the Cave. This gap limits a deeper understanding of how Walter's transition can be seen as a metaphorical emergence from illusion to truth, as described in Plato's work.

Additionally, this film portrays the journey from monotonous life to adventure and deep self-discovery, depicting personal transformation through awareness and courage to face life's challenges. (Thomas, 2020; Yastra Fandika et al., 2020). Related to philosophical theory, Plato's Allegory of the Cave provides a framework for understanding this change, in which individuals emerge from the "cave" of illusion into enlightenment and a deeper understanding of the real world, mirroring Walter's journey who also experiences significant self-awareness and transformation. (John M. Ivancevich, 2011).

In *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* (2013), the protagonist, Walter Mitty, undergoes a transformative journey that mirrors Plato's Allegory of the Cave. Plato, in his work *The Republic*, introduces the allegory, depicting a group of prisoners who are chained inside a cave, only able to see shadows projected onto the walls, which they believe to be the entirety of reality. These prisoners are trapped in a limited perception, unaware of the deeper truths outside the cave. The allegory symbolizes the human condition of being confined by illusions and how one can achieve enlightenment by confronting the uncomfortable truth of the outside world. Walter Mitty's journey mirrors this allegory as he breaks free from his mundane, fantasy-filled existence to face the reality of his life and, in doing so, discovers a deeper understanding of himself and the world around him.

The core themes of the Allegory of the Cave enlightenment, personal transformation, and self-awareness are reflected in Walter's journey. The prisoners' initial perception of reality, based only on shadows, represents limited human understanding. When one prisoner escapes the cave and sees the world outside, he realizes that the truth is far broader and more complex than he ever imagined. This process of moving from ignorance to a more profound understanding mirrors Walter Mitty's transformation, where his confrontation with reality leads to self-awareness and personal growth. The allegory also touches on the challenge of returning to the cave and attempting to share newfound knowledge with others who are resistant to change. In Walter's case, the challenge of returning to the cave and attempting to share newfound knowledge is reflected in his struggles to break free from his fantasy world and embrace a more authentic, adventurous life. Through these stages, Walter's evolution aligns with Plato's concept of enlightenment and personal transformation.

While prior research has explored the themes of self-discovery and personal growth, it has not fully examined the philosophical underpinnings of Walter Mitty's transformation, particularly through the lens of Plato's Allegory of the Cave. In Plato's allegory, prisoners are trapped in a world of illusion, and their emergence from the cave symbolizes enlightenment. Walter's journey, from a life of daydreams to real-world adventure, mirrors this allegory, yet this connection has been largely overlooked in existing research. By applying Plato's allegory, this study seeks to fill this gap and offer a more profound interpretation of Walter Mitty's transformation. While the theme of self-discovery in *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* has been extensively discussed, there remains a notable gap in academic research regarding the philosophical foundations of Walter's transformation. In this allegory, prisoners are confined to a cave, perceiving only shadows on the walls and remaining unaware of the true reality outside. (Plato, 380 C.E.). This concept closely parallels Walter's journey, as he evolves from being trapped in his fantasies to actively engaging with the real world.

This study offers the application of Plato's Allegory of the Cave as a unique lens through which to interpret Walter Mitty's transformation. While previous analyses have used psychological or literary approaches to discuss Mitty's journey, Plato's allegory provides a deeper philosophical framework that captures the process of moving from ignorance (fantasy) to knowledge (reality). Plato's concepts of illusion, reality, and enlightenment are particularly well-suited for analyzing Walter's transition, as his journey reflects the allegory's progression from being confined to a limited perception to experiencing a broader, more authentic existence. This allegorical perspective adds depth to existing analyses by emphasizing Walter's transformation not just as a personal evolution, but as a philosophical shift.

In this study, the focus is on how Walter Mitty's journey reflects the process of "emerging from the cave" as described in Plato's Allegory of the Cave. By identifying and analyzing key scenes in the film, this research focuses on Walter's progression from escapism to meaningful engagement with reality. These pivotal moments mirror the stages of emerging from ignorance to enlightenment, showing how Walter's shift from fantasy to reality parallels the allegory's depiction of a prisoner breaking free from the illusion of the cave. This study explores the physical and mental journey Walter undergoes, emphasizing how his experiences lead to a more purposeful and connected existence. By analyzing Walter's transformation through the allegorical lens, this research not only enriches the understanding of his personal growth but also offers a philosophical perspective on the nature of self-discovery and enlightenment.

The objective of this study is to contribute to academic discourse by demonstrating how ancient philosophical ideas, such as Plato's Allegory of the Cave, remain relevant in

interpreting contemporary narratives. By applying this allegory to *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*, the study aims to provide a fresh perspective on the protagonist's transformation and offer new insights into how self-discovery and personal growth are portrayed in modern film. Through this philosophical framework, the research offers deeper insights into Walter's evolution, emphasizing how his experiences contribute to his enlightenment. Additionally, the study highlights how the film inspires individuals to overcome their fears and take bold steps toward a more meaningful existence. By bridging the gap between philosophy and film analysis, this research encourages scholars to examine the connections between timeless philosophical concepts and contemporary storytelling. Ultimately, this work seeks to enrich the discussion of personal transformation in cinema and expand the scope of philosophical film analysis, while demonstrating the relevance of self-discovery and personal growth themes in contemporary life.

This approach not only enriches the discussion surrounding Walter Mitty's journey but also offers a valuable contribution to philosophy and film studies. By bridging ancient philosophical concepts with modern cinema, this study highlights how timeless struggles of human growth and self-discovery continue to be reflected in contemporary storytelling.

2. Methodology

This study analyzes key scenes from *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* (2013) using the concept of Plato's Allegory of the Cave. The film follows Walter Mitty's transformation from a man trapped in his fantasies to someone who breaks free and engages with the world, mirroring the journey described in Plato's allegory. This research focuses on interpreting both the narrative and visual elements of the film, which symbolize the process of "leaving the cave," and the protagonist's journey toward self-discovery, enlightenment, and a more meaningful existence. The material object of this research is the film *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* (2013), directed by Ben Stiller. This film serves as the central medium for analysis, exploring how the character's development aligns with the allegorical process outlined by Plato. The formal object of the study, however, is the transformation of Walter Mitty's character, interpreted through the lens of Plato's Allegory of the Cave.

The primary data for this research consists of scenes, dialogues, monologues, and narratives from the film, all of which are analyzed to identify elements that reflect the stages of transformation outlined in the Allegory of the Cave. In addition to this primary data, secondary data sources are used to support the analysis. These sources include articles, journals, film reviews, and scholarly discussions of Plato's Allegory of the Cave. The secondary data provide theoretical context and help connect the philosophical concepts with the narrative structure of the film. The data collection process involved multiple viewings of *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* to ensure that key elements were identified accurately. Significant scenes were captured through screenshots, allowing for a closer examination of the visual representation of Walter's journey. In addition, Plato's Allegory of the Cave was studied in depth to draw connections between philosophical ideas and the progression of Walter's character. Relevant secondary sources, such as academic articles and film reviews, were also gathered to enrich the analysis.

Data analysis involved comparing the key elements of the film with the stages of transformation outlined in Plato's Allegory. This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of how Walter's character evolves, both physically and psychologically, as he steps out of his "cave" of fantasy and begins to engage more fully with the world. The analysis also explored how the visual elements of the film, including the cinematography and use of color, enhance

the narrative of personal transformation and enlightenment. To ensure the validity of the research, triangulation was employed. This method involves integrating multiple data sources, including primary and secondary data, to verify and strengthen the analysis. The triangulation process in this study consisted of three key steps. First, it utilized various types of data sources, including primary data from the film such as specific scenes and dialogues, and secondary data from scholarly articles, journals, and reviews that discuss Plato's Allegory of the Cave and its applications. Second, the methods of comparison or integration involved systematically analyzing how the narrative and visual elements of the film correspond to the philosophical stages of emerging from the "cave." This included identifying thematic parallels, visual symbolism, and character development to ensure a comprehensive alignment between the primary and secondary data. Finally, the triangulation process contributed to the reliability and robustness of the findings by integrating diverse perspectives, combining theoretical insights with detailed film analysis, and ensuring interpretations were well-supported and accounted for multiple dimensions of the subject matter.

By combining these different sources of information, this research can offer a more comprehensive understanding of the connection between Plato's philosophical theory and the narrative development of Walter Mitty. Triangulation of sources helps to ensure that the analysis is thorough and well-supported by diverse perspectives.

Additionally, this research contributes to broader discussions on the themes of self-discovery, enlightenment, and the tension between reality and fantasy. It also highlights the philosophical implications of Walter Mitty's journey, particularly regarding the universal human quest for meaning, purpose, and freedom. This study is expected to shed light on how the film's narrative and visual techniques engage with these important philosophical themes, providing a fresh perspective on the ongoing relevance of Plato's allegory in contemporary society.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Result

This section discusses and describes the findings from the film *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* (2013) through the concept of Plato's Allegory of the Cave. According to Plato's allegory, leaving the cave symbolizes the journey from ignorance and illusion to enlightenment and truth. (Mike Bedard, 2022). Each identified finding is analyzed to illustrate how Walter Mitty's journey mirrors the metaphorical process of escaping the "cave" representing his limited self-perception. The analysis examines key scenes that depict Walter's stages of enlightenment, both physical and mental. These findings were obtained from the analysis of the film's main scenes, which were compared to the stages in Plato's Allegory of the Cave, regarding character changes, personal growth in facing real-life challenges, and Mitty's journey to get out of the "cave". Thus, this section presents an in-depth analysis of how Walter's character journey not only reflects the process of emerging from the "cave" of illusion but also depicts significant personal growth in facing real-life challenges.

3.1.1. Scenes in the film depicting the process of leaving the cave according to Plato's Allegory of the Cave

The findings from these scenes depict Walter Mitty's gradual journey out of his metaphorical "cave," reflecting stages of enlightenment. Each scene highlights the steps Walter takes, starting from his daily routines that confine him, to major decisions that lead him to new

places, as well as the challenges he must face along the way. This journey involves not only physical movement to locations he has never visited before but also mental and emotional transformation. Walter begins confronting his fears, stepping out of his comfort zone, and discovering new meaning in his life. With each step he takes, he becomes increasingly aware of his long-hidden potential, strengthening the connection between the real world he experiences and the inner enlightenment he achieves.

1.1. Walter's routine at the office



Figure 1. (00:11:29). This scene depicts Walter's routine at the office.



Figure 2. (00:09:57). This scene depicts Walter immersed in his world of imagination.

The ice, yes?
She moves like a woman.
I'm Walter. Mitty.
Cheryl. Melhoff.
Where have you been?
Testing the limits
of the human "espirit".
I'd like to climb your
hair, test that out.
Perhaps I can contact you,
possibly through my poetry falcon.
Poetry falcon.
I like that.

Figure 3. Dialogue when Walter Mitty is lost in his imagination

At the film's beginning, Walter Mitty is depicted as living a monotonous routine as a negative asset manager in a magazine office *Life*. His life is dominated by repetitive tasks and a gloomy work environment, such as a dark office, a cluttered desk, and an excessive habit of daydreaming. For Walter, his fantasies feel real, this is the main symbol of the confinement he experiences. His daydreams provide him an escape from the dullness and frustrations of his reality. In his fantasies, he often imagines himself as a hero, performing daring feats and experiencing thrilling adventures. However, in reality, his life remains constrained by the routines of his office work and his social isolation. This reflects how Walter is metaphorically trapped in a "cave," a place where one is confined to a limited, false reality. His daydreams represent the shadows on the cave wall, just as in Plato's allegory, where prisoners perceive only shadows as their truth, unaware of the world outside the cave. For Walter, his daydreams are his only form of escape, and he is unaware of the potential for change and growth that exists beyond his comfort zone. His worldview is confined by his fears, insecurities, and the monotonous yet safe environment of his office job.

This reflects the early stages in Plato's Allegory of the Cave, where the prisoners live in shadow and shallow knowledge, devoid of truth or awareness of the broader, more varied real world. (Mike Yarbrough, 2013). In Plato's allegory, the cave is the Ordinary World, the circumstances (if not a physical location) the characters have been in before the story begins. An Inciting Incident, such as someone from outside the cave freeing a prisoner, acts as a Call to Adventure. (Noahspud, 2021).

1.2.The decision to leave for Greenland



Figure 4. (00:36:58). This scene shows Walter arriving at the airport, ready to travel to Greenland.

Next, Walter's journey into the real world begins when he decides to travel to Greenland, North America. This decision marks an important starting point, symbolizing his courage to leave the metaphorical "cave," where he was previously trapped in routine and illusory comfort that limited his self-exploration. The vast, unfamiliar environment of Greenland forces him out of his comfort zone, compelling him to confront real-world challenges that are far removed from the world of fantasies he had been living in. As he navigates this new environment and interacts with the people around him, Walter is confronted with situations that require real, tangible actions and decisions. This shift from passivity to active engagement with the world outside his "cave" marks a critical phase in his journey toward self-realization.

In the context of Plato's Allegory of the Cave, this phase aligns with the concept of enlightenment, which occurs when an individual moves from the shadows of ignorance to the light of knowledge. Walter's venture into Greenland is a clear representation of this transition, as he begins to step out of the limitations that his previous life had imposed on him. The once-safe routine, where he lived within the confines of his own fantasy, is replaced by the uncertainties and complexities of the real world. This journey symbolizes a deeper understanding of life, where Walter learns to embrace the unknown and face challenges head-on, ultimately facilitating his growth as an individual.

Walter's experiences in Greenland, though filled with obstacles, also serve as catalysts for self-discovery. They prompt him to question the assumptions he had previously held about himself and the world around him. By confronting and overcoming the various trials he faces, Walter opens himself up to new ways of thinking, understanding, and interacting with the world. This journey not only propels him toward self-actualization but also exemplifies the core idea of Plato's Allegory: the pursuit of enlightenment requires stepping outside one's comfort zone and confronting uncomfortable truths to grow and evolve. He wants to break free from his self-doubt and be in control of his life for a change. And so he does decide to go to Greenland setting aside his fears and doubts. (Anthony Perez, 2022).

1.3.Meeting with Sean O'Connell in the Himalayas



Figure 5. (01:24:17). This scene captures the moment when Walter finally meets Sean in the Himalayas.

Sean.
Yeah.
It's Walter.
Mitty.
Walter Mitty.
Seriously?
How the hell did you get up here?
I just...
I've been looking for you.
Sit down.
I'll sit.
Well, take your time.
Settle in.

Figure 6. Dialogue when Walter Mitty meets Sean

Walter's entire journey reaches its peak when he finally finds Sean O'Connell in the Himalayan Mountains, Afghanistan. This meeting is an important moment in his search for self-discovery. Throughout his journey, Walter has been searching for meaning, trying to understand his place in the world, and pushing himself beyond his comfort zone. The culmination of this search comes when he meets Sean, the elusive photographer, who has been a symbol of Walter's idealized vision of freedom and adventure. During their meeting, Walter discovers that the negatives of the 25th photo, which had been the driving force behind his entire trip, were stored in the wallet that Sean had given him. This discovery brought deep enlightenment to Walter, the photo did not depict anything luxurious or grandiose, but something simple but meaningful about life itself or enlightenment where the individual truly understands the meaning of life after leaving the "cave" (Neverfeltbetter, 2013). The photo, which seemed to represent the goal of his journey, was not about capturing physical moments, but about capturing the essence of life itself the beauty in the ordinary, the importance of human connections, and the courage to take risks and embrace the unknown.

This moment marks Walter's full realization of reality. He realized that the meaning of life is not found in the search for something big or extraordinary but in the acceptance and appreciation of the simple things that have always been around him. This corresponds to the third stage in Plato's Allegory of the Cave theory, self-awareness. In this stage, prisoners who make it out of the cave see a reality beyond imagination and begin to understand deeper truths about themselves and the world around them. It represents a person's journey to gain knowledge, enlightenment, and a deeper understanding of reality. (Tina Saxena, 2023).

Walter's awakening reflects a profound personal transformation. The physical journey that takes him from Greenland to finally arriving in the Himalayas parallels his inner journey to get out of the "cave" of illusions and old habits. In the process, he learns to face new challenges and risks while gaining a broader understanding of the world. Thus, this journey is not just about finding a lost photo, but rather about finding himself, a journey towards enlightenment that changes how he sees life and reality as a whole. His experience illustrates how stepping out of one's comfort zone, confronting fears, and embracing vulnerability can lead to a deeper understanding of oneself. Just as Plato's allegory shows the journey of enlightenment as a process of breaking free from limited perceptions, Walter's journey signifies his transformation into a more self-aware and enlightened individual who now sees the world with a new perspective, one that values the present and the simple beauty of life. This shift in

perception is not only a personal triumph for Walter but also serves as an inspirational message for the audience, urging them to reconsider their own understanding of life and the importance of embracing the unknown to discover the richness of the world around them.

1.4. Walter shows the 25th photo negative



Figure 7. (01:36:19). This scene shows Walter returning to the office to deliver the 25th negative

Oh, hey. Welcome.
Wait, I'm sorry, not welcome.
Not an employee.
Sorry.
There's the picture
Sean wanted. 25.
You have two days
to print for cover.
There's your quintessence.
Hey.
Do you know our motto?
"Life...
"I'm lovin' it?"
No.
That's McDonald's.
This thing that you do, Ted...
where you come into a place
and you push people out.
You should know that those
people worked really hard
to build this magazine.
They believed in the motto.

Figure 8. Dialogue when Walter delivers the 25th negative photo

After finding the negatives of the 25th photo, Walter returned to his office to hand it over to his boss. However, Walter's actions are not merely about completing a task, he also delivers a deeper message about the true meaning of *Life* magazine's motto: *"To see the world, dangerous things to come to, to see behind walls, draw closer, to find each other and to feel. That is the purpose of Life."* In this moment, Walter not only delivers a photo that represents the essence of the magazine but also embodies a profound understanding of its values. In this moment, Walter not only delivers a photo that represents the essence of the magazine but also embodies a profound understanding of its values. By doing so, he demonstrates his growth throughout the journey, transitioning from a reserved and cautious individual to someone who fully appreciates and internalizes the magazine's core principles of adventure, exploration, and authenticity. This act symbolizes the culmination of his transformation and his alignment with the spirit of *Life* magazine, which celebrates the extraordinary within the ordinary. Walter Mitty discovers that within him lies dormant the courage he so often imagined. (Aubrey Almanza, 2014).

Walter's transformation aligns with the fourth stage in Plato's Allegory of the Cave, which revolves around the challenge of returning to the cave. This stage is defined by the experience of those who have escaped the cave, seen the truth, and feel compelled to return and help others still trapped in the shadows. The aim is to open their eyes to the true reality and encourage them to embrace a deeper understanding. However, this process is fraught with difficulty, as those who remain in the cave tend to resist new knowledge, rejecting it because it contradicts their beliefs. Walter's actions symbolize his success in comprehending the truth and his courage to share this newfound understanding with others.

By returning and challenging his boss's perspective, Walter takes a bold step in demonstrating that self-transformation does not stop at the individual level. It extends into

taking responsibility for inspiring change in others. Walter's willingness to challenge the status quo illustrates his growth and the realization that the truth he has discovered is worth sharing, even when it invites resistance. His journey exemplifies an ongoing process of enlightenment and transformation that reaches beyond personal liberation. It is an empowerment of others, encouraging them to confront reality beyond their limitations. Through this act, Walter not only demonstrates his enlightenment but also his desire to inspire broader change. He invites those around him to question the confines of their perceptions, encouraging them to face the truth that lies beyond their self-imposed limitations.

3.1.2. Walter Mitty's physical and mental journey

The findings of these scenes depict Walter's physical adventure and mental growth as he steps out of his comfort zone to face the challenges of the real world. This journey explores new places to reflect Walter's emotional and psychological transformation. By confronting his fears and taking risks, Walter learns to find meaning in real-life experiences, leaving behind the fantasies he once used as an escape. This illustrates that physical journeys often serve as metaphors for inner journeys, helping individuals discover their true selves and life purpose.

1.1. Physical travel to a new location



Figure 9. (00:46:49). This scene illustrates Walter running and jumping into a helicopter

After Greenland, Walter continued his journey in search of Sean. He ran and jumped into the helicopter with newfound bravery, an act that illustrates his determination to proceed to Iceland, Europe, a pivotal destination in his transition out of the "cave." This action represents his physical journey and courage in confronting challenges he had never faced. Walter's resolve to move forward, despite the inherent risks and dangers, signifies his breaking free from the metaphorical "chains" that had long kept him imprisoned in the confines of his fears and illusions. This moment aligns with the stage of enlightenment in Plato's Allegory of the Cave, where the individual, once freed from ignorance, steps into the light, beginning to see the world for what it truly is. In the allegory, this stage represents the transition from perceiving mere shadows of reality to understanding the true nature of existence. It symbolizes the awakening of the mind to knowledge and truth, as the person confronts and adjusts to a new perspective that challenges their previous misconceptions. The light, often associated with knowledge and wisdom, reveals the essence of things beyond superficial appearances, marking a pivotal shift in understanding and personal growth.

As Walter ventures further into unknown territory, literally and metaphorically, he begins shedding the limitations that had defined his previous life. No longer confined by fear, uncertainty, or the boundaries of his comfort zone, Walter embraces new challenges. This marks a crucial shift from a life built on illusions to one of self-awareness and personal growth. His journey becomes a testament to the human capacity to evolve and transcend adversity, accepting the unknown with an

open heart and mind. Each new experience, and each risk he takes, symbolizes a deeper understanding of the world around him, his place within it, and the greater meaning of his existence.

Walter's courageous willingness to face these new challenges underscores a universal truth: the path to enlightenment and self-discovery often requires stepping beyond the familiar and confronting the unknown. This mirrors Plato's allegory, which teaches that true liberation and wisdom come only when one steps outside the "cave" of ignorance and embraces the light of new experiences. For Walter, the journey toward enlightenment is not a simple, linear process; it is a series of courageous steps toward personal growth, each one bringing him closer to a deeper understanding of himself and the world he once overlooked.

1.2. Mental change through challenges



Figure 10. (01:04:44). This scene depicts Walter avoiding a volcanic eruption

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Hello. Hello.  
Come on, come on. Eldgos!  
What's going on?  
Where is everybody?  
Eldgos.  
Eldgos!  
Eldgos. Eldgos.  
What does that mean?  
Eretion.  
Erertion?  
Erection!  
"Erection"?  
Yes. No!  
Eruption!  
Eruption!  
Yes.  
Sean.  
Faster! Go faster!  
Holy sh*t! Faster!  
Oh, my God!  
Thanks for coming back for me.  
I really appreciate it.
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Figure 11. Dialogue when Walter Mitty meets someone to avoid an eruption

In Iceland, Walter encountered a dangerous moment when he narrowly avoided a volcanic eruption. With the people he met on his journey, Walter managed to avoid this danger. This incident illustrates the mental changes he experienced through real challenges that push him out of his comfort zone. His journey becomes not only a physical adventure but a deeply personal and transformative one. (Aubrey Holdaway, 2024). Each obstacle he overcame tested his physical endurance, symbolizing his emotional and mental evolution. This resonates with the stages of enlightenment described in Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*, where a prisoner begins to free themselves from the "chains" that bind them to a limited and distorted understanding of reality. These "chains" symbolize ignorance, preconceived notions, or societal constraints that prevent individuals from perceiving the truth. As the prisoner gradually emerges from the cave and ascends toward the light, the prisoner undergoes a transformative journey of self-awareness, knowledge, and understanding. The light, representing truth and enlightenment, requires effort and courage to embrace, signifying the challenging but rewarding process of personal growth and intellectual liberation.

Walter's experiences teach him to confront new challenges and develop a deeper understanding of life. This evolution marks a transition from a life of fantasy and safety into a world of action and responsibility. In each significant moment, he finds a new layer of meaning and purpose, reflecting the allegory's depiction of an individual breaking free from the constraints of ignorance and illusion. Walter's journey, therefore, represents the transformation

of an individual from living in illusions to embracing reality with courage and insight, ultimately leading to a fuller and more authentic existence. His story exemplifies the existential growth in accepting life's complexities, making his journey an inspiring model of personal and philosophical enlightenment.

3.3. Discussion

This study examines *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* (2013) through the lens of Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*, delving into themes of self-discovery, freedom, and the transition from fantasy to meaningful reality. (Jotted Lines, 2020). In this film, Walter Mitty's physical and mental journey reflects the process of leaving the world of shadows to a more meaningful world of reality. This is consistent with Plato's concept of liberation from the limitations of perception. (N.S. Gill, 2024). As Walter Mitty embarks on his adventures, he faces challenges that require him to confront his fears, step outside his comfort zone, and embrace the unknown, all of which symbolize the philosophical concept of emerging from the "cave" into a new understanding of the world. This transformation is external and internal, Mitty's journey involves a shift in his perception of himself and his potential, paralleling Plato's idea that true knowledge can only be attained by breaking free from illusions. This study aims to explore how the film conveys messages about personal freedom and transformation through the protagonist's internal and external journeys, highlighting how his experiences lead to a deeper understanding of his identity and the world around him. Ultimately, the film illustrates the importance of embracing reality and seeking growth, aligning with philosophical reflections on the quest for meaning and enlightenment.

Previous research by Indra Pujianto (2015) focused on self-discovery and courage, highlighting Walter's transition from a passive dreamer to an active participant in life. This research emphasizes the personal development aspect of Walter's character. Meanwhile, De Menezes (2020) explored the tension between reality and possibility, focusing on Walter's internal struggle in choosing between his dull real life and his exciting fantasies. While both studies explore aspects of Walter's journey, they do not address the deeper philosophical implications that this research does by linking his transformation to Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*. Elizabeth Stallings (2023) discussed James Thurber's original short story as a critique of 1930s American society, blending Walter's fantasies with his mundane reality. This study adds a socio-economic perspective, focusing on themes of escapism and consumerism. However, this research approaches the character's transformation from a philosophical standpoint, applying Plato's *Allegory of the Cave* to analyze Walter's shift from illusion to reality. Cooper-White (2014) introduces the concept of intersubjectivity to understand Walter's development, emphasizing his interactions with others that lead him to confront his fears and embrace real-life challenges. This research is valuable, and focuses more on relational dynamics, while the current study explores Walter's journey through a philosophical lens. Karina Wahyu Rahmawati (2018) interprets Walter's journey as a metaphor for the interaction between accidents and choices in shaping identity. This perspective, though insightful, does not address the philosophical process of Walter's transition from fantasy to enlightenment, which the current study emphasizes using Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*. While previous studies highlight self-discovery, personal transformation, and societal critique, this research provides a more in-depth analysis by connecting Walter's physical and mental journey to Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*. This study introduces a philosophical dimension to Walter's character arc, offering a broader perspective on his journey from fantasy to reality.

Using a philosophical approach, this study offers a fresh perspective on life's themes in films. By applying the *Allegory of the Cave*, links Walter's transformation to the process of escaping fantasy and attaining self-awareness. (Younes DDigital, 2024). This approach provides a deeper understanding of how the film discusses personal freedom and the search for meaning in life. (Michael Wiitala, 2024). The Allegory of the Cave metaphorically illustrates Walter's journey from a life constrained by fantasy and illusion to a more meaningful and grounded existence. As he emerges from the "cave," Walter's experiences mirror the philosopher's idea of self-realization and enlightenment.

However, the focus on Plato's perspective may limit the scope compared to studies that incorporate visual and musical elements as integral to the themes of self-discovery and freedom in the film. The cinematic techniques, including the striking landscapes and the music that underscores pivotal moments in Walter's journey, play an essential role in reinforcing the message of liberation and personal growth. A more holistic analysis that accounts for these elements could reveal a more comprehensive interpretation of how the film conveys Walter's transformation. Despite this, the study's philosophical approach provides a meaningful lens through which to examine the film's existential themes, allowing for a deeper appreciation of the character's progression toward enlightenment and the broader narrative of personal freedom.

4. Conclusion

This research analyzes the transformation of Walter Mitty's character in the film *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* (2013) using Plato's Allegory of the Cave, by identifying scenes that demonstrate the process of coming out of the "cave" in the film. It also describes the physical and mental journey of the main character as he transitions from a fantasy world to a true and meaningful reality. The findings reveal that Walter's journey represents a stage of emerging from the metaphorical "cave" towards enlightenment and self-understanding. Initially, Walter lives a monotonous routine, reflecting his confinement in illusion, where he escapes into his daydreams to avoid facing reality. His daily existence is marked by avoidance and fantasy, making it clear that he is trapped in a cycle of self-deception.

The decision to embark on a journey to Greenland marked Walter's first step out of the "cave" of illusion and safety, where he was confined to a life of fantasy and complacency. In Greenland, he confronted real challenges, demanding him to adapt and stretch beyond his comfort zone. These challenges forced him to see the world from a broader, more authentic perspective, which closely aligns with Plato's concept of escaping the "shadows" in the cave.

As Walter continued his journey, the moment that truly marked his transformation occurred when he met Sean O'Connell in the Himalayas. Sean, a photographer and adventurer, imparted a profound lesson: true happiness is not found in pursuing wealth or fame, but in appreciating the simple, often overlooked moments in life. This revelation is pivotal in Walter's growth, symbolizing the self-awareness stage in Plato's theory, where the individual recognizes and values the deeper, unpretentious aspects of existence. The idea that true contentment lies not in material or superficial achievements, but in genuine experiences and connections, catalyzes Walter's enlightenment, marking a key turning point in his journey toward self-discovery.

After achieving enlightenment, Walter returned to his office to hand over the 25 photo negatives, showing his courage by giving others a new understanding of the meaning of life. Returning to his everyday life signifies his transformation from a man confined by fear and routine to someone who has embraced the unknown. Walter's journey, from a gloomy routine

to facing challenges in Greenland, Iceland, and the Himalayas, depicts an emotional and mental transformation. This film represents the human journey from limitations to enlightenment, highlighting the importance of having the courage to leave the comfort zone to find a deeper meaning in life. Walter Mitty's journey also changes the normal flow of time, where Walter does not go to the office for several days because his travels ultimately change his understanding of the world and his perspective on reality. These changes illustrate how his physical and emotional journey shaped his view of time and existence (Irma Puspita Devi, 2022). The narrative shows that the passage of time is not merely linear but is deeply influenced by the transformations experienced in human emotional and mental landscapes. Walter's journey challenges the conventional perception of time, suggesting that true transformation alters not only one's identity but also one experiences and relates to the world around them.

This research provides a new approach to film analysis of *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* through the lens of Plato's Allegory of the Cave, a perspective that has not been widely explored in previous studies of this film. While many studies have addressed the film's theme of self-discovery, this study fills a gap in academic scholarship by focusing on the philosophical underpinnings of Mitty's transformation. By comparing the character's journey to the Allegory of the Cave, this research offers fresh insights into how literature and film reflect the human struggle to transcend self-imposed limitations and achieve enlightenment. Walter's transition from a life of fantasy to engaging with the realities of the world around him exemplifies the concept of moving beyond the "shadows on the wall" and toward a fuller understanding of one's existence. This journey highlights the human desire for growth and a deeper understanding of life, showing how the process of self-discovery can lead to a more authentic and meaningful existence.

However, this research is limited to applying Plato's philosophical perspective, and the analysis may not cover all aspects of Mitty's character change as extensively as other studies. Specifically, this study primarily focuses on the philosophical dimensions and may not explore other psychological or sociocultural factors affecting the character's transformation in detail. Therefore, there is still room for further development and a more holistic analysis. Future research could compare the use of allegory theory in other films that depict personal transformation, examining how different allegories and philosophical frameworks shape our understanding of character development.

To elaborate further, examining character development in fictional narratives can offer a unique lens through which we understand the dynamic nature of personal growth. By exploring how characters evolve in response to challenges, readers or viewers can better appreciate the complexities of change, which may mirror the transformative processes that individuals experience in real life. This insight can be particularly valuable in educational contexts, where understanding the nature of personal growth can inform more effective teaching methods. For example, educators can incorporate narrative-driven lessons to foster emotional and cognitive development in students. Furthermore, case studies that delve into the practical applications of these philosophical ideas can serve as a bridge between theory and practice, providing real-world examples of how the concepts of personal transformation and self-awareness can be integrated into curricula and teaching strategies. This type of research can ultimately contribute to creating more empathetic, adaptable, and resilient learners.

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