

Elizabeth Porter

Sept. 23, 2007

ENC 1102-09C

Instructor Cuda

Plot Summary: "The Greatest Man in the World"

Thurber, James. "The Greatest Man in the World." Introduction to Literature: Reading, Analyzing, and Writing. Ed. Dorothy U. Seyler and Richard A. Wilan. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Englewood Cliffs: Longman/Prentice Hall, 1990. 410-426.

"Doomed by his Tragic Flaw"

This third person narrative presents an "inevitable" story of an aviation hero who roars out of the skies with insufficient intelligence, background and personal character to successfully endure (and deserve) the glory reserved for heroes who earned distinction by stamina, courage, and honor. The exception to the rule occurred and Jack "Pal" Smurch with stamina and physical courage flew around the world non-stop. Jack, however, is an anti-hero who becomes a threat to the established order. He is slightly built, makes a bad first impression, uneducated, crude, rude, greedy and vulgar. His background lacks distinction as his family is poor, sullen, weak-minded and thieving. In order to maintain an appropriate image of an American representative, the bureaucrats conspire with the Press to clean up Jack's image and present "Jacky" a modest quiet blond chap, popular with the girls and his friends. The Press censor his speech and action from crude bragging to sanitized statements like, "My achievement has been, I fear, slightly exaggerated." Luckily Jack Smurch collapses upon arrival from hunger and exhaustion so he is whisked away for recuperation in spite of the public clamor to receive a message from their new hero as a basic good will has swept the country in the wake of his attempt to set records and turned into outright hero worship. After weeks of being hidden, Jack demands to reap the rewards of his accomplishment. He is brought to a meeting with government officials and members of the press to educate him on proper hero etiquette where he reveals how deeply inappropriate he really is to fit the expectations of an American Hero. As he moves near an open window to cool off and yell down to the people below, the opportunity to solve the bureaucratic dilemma presents itself and a powerfully built male secretary to the Mayor of New York City seizes Smurch by the seat of his pants and shoves him out of the window with the President's approval. A "quick-witted" editor sets the tone for the official reaction to the tragedy as they all conspire to complete "the task of breaking to a grief-stricken world the sad story of the untimely death of its most illustrious and spectacular figure." In keeping with a hero's image, the funeral is elaborate with monuments and solemn ceremony befitting a national treasure; however, Mrs. Emma Smurch knows the truth of her son's character and the story ends with her being "attended" by the Secret Service while flipping burgers on a grill at her low-wage job while wearing a "twisted, strangely familiar leer on her lips."

***Note: Your documents are to be double-spaced. This sample is single-spaced to conserve paper.***