“The Secret Life of Walter Mitty” by James Thurber

Decide if these passages are narration, dialogue or both. Add context before each quote. Context leads to the quote. In other words, what would someone who has not read “Mitty” need to know?

Then add analysis after each quote. Remember that analysis answers this question: How does this example (context combined with quote) prove my thesis/point?

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Mrs. Mitty told her husband, “You’re not a young man any longer,” and Mitty “raced the engine a little” (8).

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“Back it up Mac! Look out for that Buick!” (9).

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“Walter Mitty began to wonder what the other thing was his wife had told him to get” (9).

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“Walter Mitty raised his hand briefly and the bickering attorneys were stilled” (10).

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“‘I was thinking,’ said Walter Mitty. ‘Does it ever occur to you that I am sometimes thinking?’” (11).

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“Then with that faint, fleeting smile playing about his lips, he faced the firing squad; erect and motionless, proud and disdainful, Walter Mitty the Undefeated, inscrutable to the last” (11).

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Notice how the first example is just okay. Then notice how the context and analysis in the additional versions of each sample “flavors” the passage. What words provide flavor?

1. When Mr. Mitty drops off his wife to get her hair done, she asks him to purchase some overshoes that he does not feel he needs. To explain her point, **Mrs. Mitty told her husband, “You’re not a young man any longer,” and Mitty “raced the engine a little” (8).** Pushing down on the gas pedal shows Mitty’s frustration.

When Mr. Mitty kindly drops off his wife to get her hair done, she insists that he purchase some overshoes that he clearly does not need or want. Adding an insult to the nagging, **Mrs. Mitty told her husband, “You’re not a young man any longer,” and Mitty “raced the engine a little” (8).** Pumping the gas pedal shows Mitty’s frustration with a demanding, thoughtless wife, who refuses to listen.

When Mr. Mitty drops off his wife to get her hair done, she reminds him to purchase some overshoes. While he resists her advice, **Mrs. Mitty told her husband, “You’re not a young man any longer,” and Mitty “raced the engine a little” (8).** Pumping the gas pedal shows Mitty’s childish reaction to a wife, who obviously cares about his health.

2. As Mitty snaps out of another daydream, he finds himself in the wrong lane of a parking lot. The attendant shouts, **“Back it up, Mac! Look out for that Buick!” (9).** Apparently, Mitty’s daydream could have caused an accident.

As Mitty snaps out of another daydream, he finds himself in the wrong lane of a parking lot. The attendant rudely shouts, **“Back it up, Mac! Look out for that Buick!” (9).** Apprarently, Mitty must suffer the rudeness of insolent employees. Even though Mitty should have been more careful, he did not hit anything and parking attendants should not be so discourteous. Mitty should complain.

As Mitty snaps out of another daydream, he finds himself in the wrong lane of a parking lot. The attendant urgently shouts, **“Back it up, Mac! Look out for that Buick!” (9).** Mitty must stop daydreaming before he causes an accident. What if the attendant had not been there? A parking lot attendant parks cars; he should not be babysitting careless adults. No wonder Mitty angered him. Next time, Mitty might run over a person.

3. After Mitty purchases the overshoes, he **“began to wonder what the other thing was his wife had told him to get” (9).** Mitty is forgetful.

After Mitty purchased the overshoes he does not need, he **“began to wonder what the other thing was his wife had told him to get” (9).** Mrs. Mitty puts too much stress on her husband. She practically sets him up to fail. Being aware of his forgetfulness, she should have provided him with a list. She could even run her own errands.

After purchasing the overshoes he complained about needing, he **“began to wonder what the other thing was his wife had told him to get” (9).** How could an adult be so ridiculous? He surely must be aware of his forgetfulness. Mitty should write down the things his wife needs. Passive-aggressiveness is inappropriate in a grown man.

4. Inspired by a newsboy shouting about a trial, Mitty’s daydreams puts him on trial for murder. During questioning, he implicates himself, which creates chaos in the courtroom. **“Walter Mitty raised his hand briefly and the bickering attorneys were stilled” (10).** Despite being on trial, Mitty’s dream puts him in control.

Inspired by a newsboy shouting about a trial, Mitty launches a great daydream about being on trial for murder. During questioning, he brazenly implicates himself. Despite the resulting chaos, Mitty **“raised his hand briefly and the bickering attorneys were stilled” (10).** Mitty’s daydream shows his flair for the dramatic. Not only does he risk conviction by needlessly admitting he could have killed the victim, raising his hand for just a moment commands the attention of attorneys. Even the judge cannot quiet this room. Unfortunately, Mitty does not get to finish this dream because he finally recalls the other purchase his demanding wife has assigned to him.

Inspired by a newsboy shouting about a trial, Mitty launches into yet another daydream, this time about being on trial for murder. During questioning, he stupidly implicates himself. Despite the resulting chaos, Mitty **“raised his hand briefly and the bickering attorneys were stilled” (10).** Mitty’s deep-seated desire to be important put him in greater command in a courtroom than even the judge. Apparently, a mere raising of his hand can quell quarreling attorneys. Not only is Mitty immature and hostile to his long-suffering wife, he also has childish daydreams.

5. After Mitty and his wife meet in the lobby of a hotel, she questions him about not wearing his overshoes. Mitty responds, **“I was thinking,”** and then he asks, **“Does it ever occur to you that I am sometimes thinking?” (11).** Mitty did not actually answer her question. Instead, he asked her something that she also did not answer.

After Mitty and his wife meet in the lobby of a hotel, she refuses to leave him alone about the overshoes and interrogates him about not having put them on. Mitty responds, **“I was thinking,”** and then he asks, **“Does it ever occur to you that I am sometimes thinking?” (11).** Mitty has fantastic and fun thoughts that he might like to share with his wife if she were not so difficult. No adult man needs to be told by his wife to wear overshoes. She should pay attention to him and when he asks her a question once in a while, she should respect him enough to answer.

After Mitty and his wife meet in the lobby of a hotel, she asks why he has not put on his new overshoes. Mitty responds, **“I was thinking,”** and then he asks, **“Does it ever occur to you that I am sometimes thinking?” (11).** Mitty may as well be daydreaming again for all he pays attention to their conversation. Of course he is thinking; that is all he ever does. Instead of asking her a pointless question, he should give her the respect and courtesy of a reasonable answer to a simple question.

6. As the Mittys prepare to head home, Mrs. Mitty has to return to the hotel to retrieve something she forgot. Mitty slips into his last daydream of the story, in which he is being executed. At the crucial moment, **“with that faint, fleeting smile playing about his lips, he faced the firing squad; erect and motionless, proud and disdainful, Walter Mitty the Undefeated, inscrutable to the last” (11).** Mitty’s last daydream shows his willingness to continue dreaming despite his wife’s wishes. He truly is undefeated in his determination to daydream.

As the Mittys prepare to head home, Mrs. Mitty has to return to the hotel to retrieve something she forgot. Mitty defiantly slips into his last daydream of the story, in which he is being executed. At the crucial moment, **“with that faint, fleeting smile playing about his lips, he faced the firing squad; erect and motionless, proud and disdainful, Walter Mitty the Undefeated, inscrutable to the last” (11).** Mitty’s last daydream shows his utter disregard for his wife’s wishes and any semblance of adult behavior. Of course, he stands “motionless.” And, yes, he is “disdainful,” but not for the reason he would like to think. Mitty could have accompanied his wife back to the hotel. He could have gone to get the car while she went back to the hotel. Instead, he waits stupidly in the rain having a ridiculous daydream. Mitty needs to grow up.

As the Mittys prepare to head home, Mrs. Mitty has to return to the hotel to retrieve something she forgot. Mitty knows she will not be back shortly as she claims and he patiently slips into his last daydream of the story: an execution. At the crucial moment, **“with that faint, fleeting smile playing about his lips, he faced the firing squad; erect and motionless, proud and disdainful, Walter Mitty the Undefeated, inscrutable to the last” (11).** Mitty’s imagination shows his determination to continue to endure his wife’s horrible nagging. Standing “erect and motionless” shows his determination in his dream and reflects the same in his real life. He refers to himself as “undefeated.” Good for him! Despite his wife’s unwillingness to listen to him or even to respect him at all, he maintains his true spirit in his amazing imagination.