

The role of secondary characters in shakespeare's macbeth

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



1. Often in great works of literature a seemingly secondary character has an overarching influence on all aspects of a text. This character is one who appears briefly, or not at all, but is a significant presence in the text who affects action, theme or the development of characters. In one of the pieces of literature covered this semester, explore how this character functions in the work. Macbeth is one of William Shakespeare's greater works of literature and it encompasses the idea of betrayal, violence, and guilt.

All these would not have been expressed without the support of a secondary character, which contributes to the development of the plot as well as the themes present in the play. This vital secondary character in Macbeth is Lady Macbeth. Shakespeare strategically portrays Lady Macbeth as an empowered woman and this idea itself was beyond the norm of the society during the time it was written. Her masculine character is essential as it functions as the drive that influences Macbeth's move to the dark side.

Contrary to the masculine portrayal of Lady Macbeth's character is the illustration of her character's weak and guilty state, which adds emphasis to the major theme of the play. More importantly, Shakespeare specifically placed emphasis on the relationship between Lady Macbeth and Macbeth; Lady Macbeth is the only one who Macbeth loves and receives love from. In the play, Macbeth's love for her describes her importance in his life and how she functions as a cause and foil of all his actions. In the beginning of the play, Macbeth is illustrated as a noble and heroic man.

This portrayal of Macbeth, however, is significantly changed after Lady Macbeth read his letter regarding his encounter with the three witches and

advised him to carry out an unlawful deed. Shakespeare created this controversial representation of a married couple when he portrays Lady Macbeth to be the one that is dictating Macbeth. This is accomplished by the use of harsh diction that connotes masculinity in the speeches on Lady Macbeth. “ I would, while it was smiling in my face, have pluck’d my nipple from his boneless gums, and dash’d the brains out... Notice in this quote by Lady Macbeth the vivid visual imagery that illustrates a very violent scene.

This expressed the anti-female character of Lady Macbeth as it describes that she is capable of pulling a child away and taking its brains out. The strength and power in which Lady Macbeth has clearly overwhelms Macbeth’s and this best suggested when Lady Macbeth questioned her husband’s manliness: “ When you durst do it, then you were a man; And, to be more than what you were, you would be so much more the man. In this quote, the diction “ man” appear repetitively and this reveals the idea that Lady Macbeth views Macbeth as a coward and wants him to become more of a man. These lines are significant as it functions as the incentive for Macbeth to do as she say for he felt inferior to her and wanted to prove her wrong.

This is shown when Macbeth said: “ Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck, till thou applaud the deed. Here, Macbeth has already become evil and this line reveals to readers that he is now in a more powerful position compared to Lady Macbeth, which is suggested when he called her “ chuck” and the idea of her not having any knowledge of his act. However, this line also shows that Macbeth’s actions were not only for himself but rather for Lady Macbeth to applaud and marvel about. Overall, all of these further

emphasize the fact that Lady Macbeth's masculinity is a key influence on Macbeth's decisions throughout the play and it is the cause of all the violence and betrayal that Macbeth performs.

Lady Macbeth's character is a very dynamic one, meaning that although she appears powerful and dominating at the beginning of the play, she eventually becomes weak with guilt and depression. This portrayal of Lady Macbeth greatly contributes to one of the main themes of the play, which is betrayal and guilt. In Act 1 scene 5, Lady Macbeth is described to be filled with power and determination to perform evil and this is shown when she said "Come, you spirits that tend on mortal thought, unsex me here, and fill me from the crown to the toe top-full of direst cruelty! Notice her dictating tone suggested by the diction "come" and use of an exclamation mark. Besides that, horrifying dictions were used such as "spirits", "unsex", and "cruelty". All these express the malevolence scene, as she is about to murder King Duncan and commit an act of betrayal and evil. However, her character then evolved from being evil to a character with guilt and regrets after the act was committed. "Out, damned spot! Out, I say! One: two: why, then 'tis time to do't...

Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?
" This quote portrays Lady Macbeth's speech when she was sleepwalking. This significantly reveals the guilt that she feels because it suggests her disturbed state of mind to the extent in which she cannot have peaceful sleep. The repetition of "out" connotes along with her questioning about the blood of King Duncan reveals the great extent of guilt and regret that she

had for performing the unlawful deed and the sense weakness that is overwhelming her.

Throughout the play, Lady Macbeth's character developed significantly from a confident and evil woman to a weak and bothered woman who is unable to have an rested stated of mind and this change in her character is essential as it emphasize the major theme of the overall play which is violence and guilt. Likewise to Lady Macbeth's character, Macbeth also has a very dynamic character and this change in his character, like all of his actions, is influenced by his wife.

As mentioned before, Lady Macbeth's dominance over Macbeth has caused him to abandon his noble and loyal traits to adapt to being evil and violent. It was through Lady Macbeth's manipulation and persuasion whereby Macbeth moved to the dark side and committed numerous murders. This illustration of Macbeth is then altered towards the end of the play, right after he received the news of Lady Macbeth's death. Her death triggered his reflection on life and his realization of his sins. " Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon he stage and then is heard no more. Here, Macbeth expresses his view of life in a metaphorical manner as he compares himself to an actor, who holds no significance and is easily forgotten. This line emphasizes the idea that Macbeth finds no more purpose in life after he hears of Lady Macbeth's death. It also suggests that Macbeth sees the insignificance of all the crime he has committed to maintain his superior position in society since it is something he would eventually have to

let go of. Furthermore, it is also after Lady Macbeth's death whereby Macbeth expresses a sign of cowardice after a very long time in the play.

This is when he mentioned " I pull in resolution, and begin to doubt th' equivocation of the fiend that lies like truth", which shows that he has lost confidence in his pursuit to keep his status as King. This idea is also emphasized when he encountered Macduff and said " I'll not fight thee. "

This marks a great change in his character as he begins to fear and surrender. Overall, Lady Macbeth's death had a great impact on Macbeth's character as it made him reflect on life and the lack of significance it holds.

Her death also marked the beginning to all of Macbeth's misfortune in which causes him to express fear and weakness to others. Secondary character is an important aspect of any piece of literature. As shown in Macbeth, the secondary character is the one that contributes the most to the shaping and development of the primary character. This then leads to development of the plot as a whole, which can be seen when Lady Macbeth manipulated and convinced Macbeth to murder King Duncan triggering Macbeth's move to the dark side.

In addition, a secondary character could also function as a tool to add more emphasis on the theme and moral values being conveyed in the work. This is shown when the theme of guilt and betrayal is supported by the development of Lady Macbeth's character from being masculine and evil to being mentally disturbed. In other words, it is clearly proven in Macbeth by

William Shakespeare that secondary characters have an overarching influence on all aspects of a piece of literature.