

How does
shakespeare use his
secondary characters
in macbeth



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Every character in a play or story is used in a different way; however we naturally concentrate on the main characters, the hero or villain. If possible the secondary characters have a much bigger role when it comes to what they're used for, because they not only carry the plot but they influence the audience making them feel what the playwright intended.

Not only do the secondary characters influence feelings but they also, move plot lines, clarify information and sometimes just purely entertain.

Influencing the audience to feel what you want is an amazing power in the hands of playwright; using characters to build up sympathy or hatred are the most common emotion played on. The Macduff's in Act 4 Scene 2, are the best evidence for this in Macbeth, their death, short yet significant sways the audience to hate Macbeth but somehow builds up more sympathy for him.

There's one line that hits more than any other " He has kill'd me, mother / Run away, I pray you! " hearing this line from a young boy would have made the audience's stomachs turned.

However a feeling of catharsis is given from this scene, the death of a young child, of a woman (shown as pregnant in Conall Morrison's version) some members of the audience maybe even most would have taken pleasure from it. The theory of Catharsis is an audience, watching a murder or other crime gets to experience the rush it brings, but without ever having to do it. This scene more than any other makes the audience reflect upon Macbeth's journey though out the play, how could a brave and loyal knight be breaking the natural law of combat and killing a family? Slight tricks are very obvious in this scene such as the innocents of young Macduff, his wisdom beyond his years " My father is not dead, for all your saying" makes the heart long for

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him, to try and protect even if what's going to happen is known. Lady Macbeth is quite obviously heart broken by the "flight" of her husband, "From whence himself does fly? He loves us not;" Her pain and suffering is felt, this character more than any other builds sympathy, pity and hatred. At this late point in the play the audience begins to sway away from Macbeth and herald Macduff Champion. A typical trait of Shakespeare's tragedies is there's always an element of humour to stop the audience getting too depressed.

In Macbeth this character is the Porter; many find this scene uncomfortable to sit through as it's not very funny. Placed in Act 2, Scene 3 to add humour just after the death of Duncan, the porter himself imagines himself has the porter of the gates to hell, welcoming in various sinners. He talks about the sort of people he would allow in "Here's a farmer, that hanged / himself on the expectation of plenty" followed by "an equivocator, that could / swear in both the scales against either scale; / who committed treason enough for God's sake" and finally "an / English tailor come hither, for stealing out of / a French hose". His Voice is usually manic, high and shrill, his appearance quite mad but the madness can only be properly seen in the eyes. It takes a skilled actor to play this role as he needs to get past the fact that his audience is sitting rather stiffly waiting for this to finish, even more skilful is the Porter that can make his audience laugh.

Shakespeare wrote this character many interesting lines, some very inappropriate over hearing what Macduff and Lennox are saying about drink the Porter takes it upon himself to say some of the side effects "nose-painting, sleep, and / urine" are the ones that get the laughs if any. However <https://assignbuster.com/how-does-shakespeare-use-his-secondary-characters-in-macbeth/>

he goes on to say " Lechery" is also a symptom of drink, many say this takes away from the performance and silences any laughs that may have happened. Altogether its very risky for an actor to take this part, he has to look insane even though the character is only drunk the actor always looks mad. His constant bawling of " Knock, / knock, knock! " Should amuse and terrify the audience at the same time, when delivering his lines he should look mad but somehow serious. This is a very difficult role to take on if the actor makes the audience laugh however small he is a success if not he goes down as another failed Porter comedy is very risky to put on stage. Filling in what's happened off stage is one of the most commonly used uses for a secondary character, it gets information into the audiences head without them sitting through another half an hour of play.

There are many such characters in Macbeth, the captain might have the biggest part of all he builds up the image Macbeth before the audience has ever set eyes on him. Also he fills in what's happened in the battle, telling The King of Macbeth's bravery. We meet the captain in Act 1 Scene 2; he is covered in blood and once Saved Malcolm in battle. He tells the tale of the " broil" explaining how " brave Macbeth-well he deserves that name-" " unseam'd" the traitor Macdonwald, " from the nave to the chaps". This is followed by rearing applause from the surrounding noble men, building up the image of Macbeth before the audience even sees him; making him already important and having the audience begin to make their own personal Macbeth in their heads.

He speaks of the battle and how bravely Macbeth came to the rescue just as Macdonwald and the Norwegian king Sweno had gained reinforcements,
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he simply “ carved out his passage” until he faced Sweno and killed him. Another character used to fill in the plot is Seyton, simply an armourer by profession and a servant of Macbeth. However he brings what might be the most important information given in the play, the death of Lady Macbeth. A cry sounds through the castle scaring not only the characters but the audience; Seyton runs to find out what’s happened and returns with the news “ The queen, my lord, is dead. this of course leaves the audience wondering what’s going to happen next, the queen was his source of power can he win without her? This is the first time we see that Macbeth is truly human, he mourns the death of his beloved wife “ Life’s but a walking shadow” he says, personifying death expressing it in ways the audience may not understand but defiantly pick up on his sorrow.

Some characters are used to pass messages between the “ groups” in the play; Rosse is probably the most interesting of these characters as he has a small story in himself. He greets young Macduff as “ My dearest coz”, in Shakespeare’s time this was a greeting for a relative of some sort, not only is he a relative of the Macduffs but is also a loyal lord of the king. Rosse commits an act of treachery and warns Lady Macduff, in modern day this would be called changing sides however in Shakespeare’s time this act was unforgivable. Passing messages’ not only gives the audience an increased sense of separation between the groups but it also helps fill in some information. The Naming of Macbeth as thane of Cawdor shows this, he has just been in counter with the witches when the news comes brought by Rosse “ He bade me, from him, call thee thane of Cawdor” he speaks of course of the King Duncan.

Another of Rosse's parts is at the dinner table of Macbeth castle, he has the famous line "Gentlemen, rise: his highness is not well" this lends nicely for lady Macbeth to explain her husband's "fits". Another practical use of secondary characters is to give the main parts a rest. Act 3, Scene 6 shows this the best it's one of the only scenes in the whole play that does not include Macbeth himself. In modern day theatre the break would be used for costume or make-up change however in Shakespeare's time it would have been needed for the actor to simply catch his breath again.

This scene in its self is rather boring it however both tells the audience new information, and shows the true colours of the characters and gives them a chance to view their own opinion. To keep the audience interested the actors would not only have to talk but use their body language and hand movements to keep the audiences' eyes on them, also moving around the stage emphasizes that this is important. For instance in times of conflict circling while speaking definitely catches attention, same as talking with your hands shows your expressing a view point. Finally, and most important to this particular play having characters say or do something that reminds the audience of real life. In Macbeth the Witches are used to flatter King James VI (King James I of Scotland) as the king had a slight fixation with the supernatural he had even wrote a book on the matter (The Demonologies). The act of putting witches in the play would not only have impressed the king and kept Shakespeare as one of the king's men, but it terrified his audience.

There song more so "Double, double toil and trouble; /Fire burn and cauldron bubble" said in a manipulating voice the effect on the audience <https://assignbuster.com/how-does-shakespeare-use-his-secondary-characters-in-macbeth/>

would be like no other. They lived in a time where the threat of witches was a very real one; they were burning women at the stake as the play was being performed. In the day of Shakespeare expressing the witches as hags would have been terrifying but to modern day audiences it becomes a challenge to scare as the threat of witches just isn't here anymore. Many directors have tried to overcome this by showing them as young women, children, and even in the case of Spielberg just not showing them simply a silhouette. It would frighten the audience a lot more if signs of the occult were used, possibly have young women each standing on a point of a triquetra because in this time people are scared of the un-known.

Also at the time the play would have been seen, the thought of Macbeth killing his king would have terrified more than the witches as very recently they had had the gun power plot. So the memory of guy folks' attempt on the kings life would have been fresh in their heads and to watch Macbeth take the life of his king would naturally have made them intrigued maybe even have the feeling of catharsis. I believe that secondary characters are in most cases more important than the main ones, without secondary characters you would have to sit through a 6hr long play in which there'd be total confusion. However there is a downfall to secondary characters, in every version I have seen they have hidden behind horrible Scottish accents. It is of course " the Scottish play" but a fake Scottish accent shows the audience the uncertainty you have in the role, if the actor understands his role and can perform it well the accent is simply not needed.

With it being a play and not a book or film, the secondary characters must be congratulated on their self control during soliloquies as these characters are <https://assignbuster.com/how-does-shakespeare-use-his-secondary-characters-in-macbeth/>

not the centre of attention but somehow are always noticed. There are many more ways in which secondary characters can be used however the ones named are the most popular in this play, and they are the ones the audience sees most.