



## **SPOTLIGHTING MINOR AND SIDE CHARACTERS BEYOND THE HERO'S DOMINANCE IN LITERARY WORKS**

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### ***Abstract***

*This study examines the evolving role of minor and side characters in narrative structures traditionally dominated by a central hero. Conventional storytelling in literature, film, and media has long prioritized the protagonist as the primary driver of plot and thematic meaning, often reducing secondary characters to limited, functional roles. This hero-centric model restricts the interpretive depth of narratives and overlooks the potential contributions of less notable individuals. Addressing this gap, the study explores how minor and side characters can function as complex, autonomous agents who enrich narrative development, provide alternative perspectives, and deepen thematic complexity. Using qualitative textual analysis across novels and films, the research investigates narrative techniques that decenter the hero, including multi-perspective storytelling, ensemble structures, and nonlinear narratives. The study is guided by key questions regarding the expanded roles of secondary characters, the strategies used to elevate them, and the broader cultural implications of redistributing narrative focus. Findings suggest that highlighting minor characters not only enhances audience engagement but also challenges hierarchical storytelling conventions and promotes inclusivity in representation. In conclusion, this research shows how minor and side characters are not trivial, yet they have independent stories that go beyond the singular dominance of the hero.*

**Keywords:** *minor characters; side characters; narrative structure; hero-centric storytelling; multi-perspective narrative*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The concept of the central hero has long dominated the theoretical and practical study of storytelling across literature, film, and other media. Traditionally, narratives are structured around a single protagonist whose journey drives the plot and embodies the core themes of the story. This model, often reinforced by classical frameworks such as the hero's journey, positions the main character as the primary focus while other characters exist mainly to support, challenge, or assist them (Firzatullah et al., 2025; Greenwood et al., 2021; Reed, 2019). As a result, minor and side characters are frequently reduced to simplified roles, such as mentors, sidekicks, or antagonistic obstacles, without substantial development or independent significance. However, contemporary

storytelling increasingly questions this hero-centric approach by emphasizing the value of other characters. Modern narratives are beginning to shift away from rigid hierarchies, offering greater attention to secondary characters and allowing them to exist as complex yet multidimensional individuals (Akhter, 2020; Selden et al., 2013; Wijaya et al., 2024). These characters are no longer merely functional; instead, they often possess their motivations, arcs, and thematic importance. This shift reflects a broader evolution in narrative practices, where stories aim to capture a wider range of perspectives and experiences rather than privileging a single dominant viewpoint (Demmerle, 2021; Martin, 2025; Rosen, 2015).

Despite this growing trend, a significant problem remains, namely, the continued dominance of the hero in narrative analysis and interpretation. By focusing primarily on the protagonist, critics and audiences may overlook the contributions of minor characters, thereby limiting the depth and richness of textual interpretation. Side characters often hold the potential to reveal alternative viewpoints, challenge dominant ideologies, and deepen the emotional and thematic layers of a story (Baldick, 2015; Culpeper, 2014; Pasopati et al., 2025). When these characters are underexplored, important narrative possibilities are lost, and the overall complexity of the work is diminished. Furthermore, there is still a lack of comprehensive academic research that systematically examines the role and significance of these characters within narrative structures.

In response to this gap, the study sets out several key objectives. First, it seeks to analyze how minor and side characters contribute to narrative depth beyond their traditional supporting roles. This includes examining their influence on plot development, thematic expression, and audience engagement (Gardner, 2010; Gaut & Lopes, 2005; Pasopati et al., 2024). Second, the study aims to investigate narrative techniques that decenter the hero, such as multi-perspective storytelling, ensemble casts, and nonlinear structures. These approaches allow for a redistribution of narrative focus, enabling secondary characters to emerge as central figures. Third, the study explores how shifting attention away from the hero affects audience perception and then encourages viewers and readers to engage with stories in more complex and nuanced ways (Akhter, 2020; Selden et al., 2013; Wijaya et al., 2024).

To guide this inquiry, several research questions are posed. These include examining the expanded roles of minor characters, identifying storytelling strategies that elevate them, and considering the broader cultural and ideological implications of reducing the hero's dominance. Such questions are essential for understanding how narratives can move beyond traditional hierarchies (Firzatullah et al., 2025; Greenwood et al., 2021; Reed, 2019). The significance of this study lies in its contribution to multiple academic fields, including literary criticism, film studies, and narrative theory. By challenging established norms and offering new frameworks for analyzing character roles, it encourages a more inclusive and diverse approach to storytelling. Moreover, it provides valuable insights to creators, inspiring them to craft richer, more balanced narratives that fully utilize the potential of all characters, not just the hero (Gardner, 2010; Gaut & Lopes, 2005; Pasopati et al., 2024).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Theoretical Frameworks on Character Hierarchies*

The study of character hierarchy in narratives is deeply informed by key theoretical frameworks, particularly structuralism and post-structuralism. Structuralism views narratives as systems composed of interrelated elements. Within this framework, characters are understood not as independent individuals but as functional components that fulfill specific roles within the narrative structure (Gardner, 2010; Gaut & Lopes,

2005; Pasopati et al., 2024). For example, a character may act as a helper, opponent, or mediator, contributing to the progression of the plot. This perspective reinforces the idea of hierarchy, where the protagonist occupies the central position and other characters exist primarily to support the overall system. In contrast, post-structuralism challenges the stability and rigidity of such hierarchical models. Influenced by theorists like Jacques Derrida, post-structuralism emphasizes the fluidity and instability of meaning within texts. From this viewpoint, narrative authority is not fixed but constantly shifting, allowing for multiple interpretations and perspectives (Baldick, 2015; Culpeper, 2014; Pasopati et al., 2025). Characters, including minor ones, are no longer confined to predetermined roles; instead, they can disrupt or reinterpret the narrative structure. This theoretical shift opens the possibility of re-evaluating the importance of side characters. Rather than being subordinate to the hero, they can be seen as sites of alternative meaning and resistance. By destabilizing traditional hierarchies, post-structuralism provides a critical foundation for understanding how narratives can move beyond the dominance of the protagonist and embrace a more decentralized and dynamic approach to storytelling (Demmerle, 2021; Kidd & Castano, 2013; Woloch, 2006).

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the roles and significance of minor and side characters within narrative texts of novels and films. Qualitative textual analysis serves as the primary approach, allowing for an in-depth examination of how characters are constructed, represented, and positioned within stories (Krippendorf, 2018). Rather than focusing on numerical data, this method emphasizes interpretation, meaning-making, and the exploration of narrative nuances, making it especially suitable for literary and media analysis. To strengthen the analysis, the study adopts a comparative case study approach across multiple genres, including literature, film, and television. By examining diverse narrative forms, the research identifies patterns and variations in how minor characters are underlined. This cross-genre comparison provides a broader understanding of storytelling strategies and highlights how different media challenge or reinforce hero-centered conventions.

For data collection, the study utilizes close reading as a key technique. Close reading involves a detailed and careful examination of specific passages, dialogues, and character interactions to uncover subtle narrative elements. This method enables researchers to identify the development of minor characters and their contributions to the overall story. Moreover, content analysis is used as the primary technique for qualitative data analysis. Through systematic coding and categorization of textual elements, the study identifies recurring themes, character functions, and narrative patterns. This structured approach ensures that interpretations remain consistent and grounded in textual evidence, supporting the understanding of the evolving role of minor characters.

As the supporting method, the theoretical lens of Jacques Derrida's deconstruction is also applied to critically interrogate traditional hierarchies within narratives. Derridean deconstruction enables the study to question binary oppositions such as main versus minor characters, revealing how supposedly secondary figures can disrupt, redefine, or even destabilize the authority of the hero (Derrida, 1978; Djanarko & Pasopati, 2019). This perspective helps uncover hidden meanings and alternative interpretations embedded within the text. Through this approach, attention is no longer focused solely on the central character but is also directed toward minor and side characters, who have often been overlooked or undervalued.

## DISCUSSION

### *The Hero-Centric Narrative Tradition*

The hero-centric narrative tradition has long shaped storytelling across literature, film, and other media. At its core lies the idea that a single protagonist serves as the central force driving the plot and embodying the story's primary themes (Hamdani et al., 2023; Ibrahim et al., 2024; Luckhurst & Marks, 2014). One of the most influential models supporting this tradition is the monomyth, or the hero's journey, popularized by Joseph Campbell (Campbell, 2008). This framework outlines a universal narrative pattern in which the hero embarks on an adventure, faces trials, undergoes transformation, and significantly returns with newfound knowledge or power. Such structures reinforce the centrality of the hero as the main agent of change and meaning (Demmerle, 2021; Martin, 2025; Rosen, 2015). Within this tradition, protagonists play an important part in determining audience identification. Readers and viewers are encouraged to align emotionally and psychologically with the hero, experiencing the narrative through their perspective (Akhter, 2020; Selden et al., 2013; Wijaya et al., 2024). This alignment often marginalizes other characters, positioning them primarily in relation to the protagonist's journey. As a result, side characters frequently serve instrumental roles, such as mentors who guide, companions who assist, or antagonists who challenge, rather than existing as fully developed individuals (Baldick, 2015; Culpeper, 2014; Pasopati et al., 2025). However, modern scholarship has increasingly critiqued the dominance of the hero in narrative structures. Critics argue that this focus limits the complexity of storytelling by privileging a single viewpoint and reinforcing hierarchical models of importance (Hamdani et al., 2023; Ibrahim et al., 2024; Luckhurst & Marks, 2014). It can also obscure alternative perspectives and voices, particularly those of marginalized or secondary characters. Consequently, there is a growing call to move beyond hero-centered frameworks and to explore more inclusive narrative approaches that distribute significance more evenly among characters. One main issue is that such minor and side characters have their own specific lives that work independently and even unrelated to the hero (Baldick, 2015; Culpeper, 2014; Pasopati et al., 2025).

### *Otherwise than Hero*

Modern literary and cultural developments have increasingly positioned the main character as an almost absolute figure within narrative works, whether in drama, prose, or poetry. In many conventional storytelling models, the protagonist functions as the central axis around which the entire fictional world revolves (Firzatullah et al., 2025; Greenwood et al., 2021; Reed, 2019). Their desires, conflicts, and resolutions determine not only the direction of the plot but also the meaning and purpose of the narrative itself. As a result, the story unfolds primarily as a journey of self-fulfillment for the main character, reinforcing their dominance as the core of narrative significance. In contrast, minor and side characters have historically been relegated to secondary and often marginal roles. Rather than being treated as fully realized individuals with their agency, they are typically constructed to serve the needs of the protagonist. Their presence is frequently justified only in relation to how they assist, challenge, or complement the main character (Gardner, 2010; Gaut & Lopes, 2005; Pasopati et al., 2024). Consequently, the personal histories, motivations, and inner worlds of these characters are often overlooked or undervalued. Even when they are given detailed dialogue, expressive gestures, or elaborate backstories, these elements tend to be interpreted merely as decorative features. Those then tend to enrich the protagonist's narrative rather than being meaningful

components in their own right. This imbalance ultimately limits the narrative's potential for complexity and depth (Akhter, 2020; Selden et al., 2013; Wijaya et al., 2024).

The dominance of the protagonist also reinforces a rigid binary between the protagonist and antagonist, further marginalizing other characters within the story. This dichotomy often perpetuates the simplistic assumption that the protagonist embodies moral goodness, while the antagonist represents evil (Hamdani et al., 2023; Ibrahim et al., 2024; Luckhurst & Marks, 2014). However, such a binary framework oversimplifies the dynamics of narrative conflict. In reality, antagonists are not inherently immoral; their role is defined by their opposition to the protagonist's objectives rather than by any intrinsic ethical deficiency. By focusing excessively on this opposition, narratives risk neglecting the broader spectrum of characters who exist outside this binary. Minor and side characters, in particular, are often dismissed as mere assistants or ornamental presences, with the assumption that their removal would not significantly alter the story's outcome (Gardner, 2010; Gaut & Lopes, 2005; Pasopati et al., 2024). However, this assumption fails to recognize the crucial role that these characters play in shaping the narrative's aesthetic and thematic richness. Minor and side characters frequently possess independent lives, perspectives, and emotional complexities that extend beyond their interactions with the protagonist (Baldick, 2015; Culpeper, 2014; Pasopati et al., 2025). Their experiences can provide alternative viewpoints, challenge dominant ideologies, and contribute to a more nuanced representation of the fictional world. Often, it is precisely known that these characters, who add texture and realism to the narrative, are making it more engaging and relatable.

Therefore, the continued dominance of the main character must be critically re-examined to create space for a more inclusive and multifaceted understanding of storytelling. The longstanding emphasis on the hero as the central figure has overshadowed the diversity of character archetypes that exist within narratives. Beyond the hero, there are numerous archetypal roles, such as the jester, lover, magician, outlaw, explorer, sage, innocent, artist, ruler, caregiver, and everyman, that contribute to the richness of storytelling (Akhter, 2020; Selden et al., 2013; Wijaya et al., 2024). These archetypes are often more vividly embodied in minor and side characters than in the protagonist, whose role may be constrained by narrative expectations. By shifting attention toward these characters, narratives can move beyond hierarchical structures and embrace a more dynamic and decentralized approach. This enhances the complexity of the story and allows for a broader exploration of human experience, especially challenging the traditional notion that the hero alone defines the meaning of a narrative (Demmerle, 2021; Martin, 2025; Rosen, 2015).

### ***The Role of Minor Characters in Narrative Development***

Minor and side characters, often perceived as secondary within traditional storytelling, play a far more significant role in narrative development than is commonly acknowledged. Rather than existing merely to support the protagonist, these characters actively shape the progression, emotional resonance, and ethical complexity of a story (Hamdani et al., 2023; Ibrahim et al., 2024; Luckhurst & Marks, 2014). By examining their functions as catalysts for plot progression, emotional anchors, and moral counterpoints, it becomes clear that minor characters are essential in creating rich and dynamic narratives.

One of the most crucial roles of minor characters lies in their ability to initiate and influence key events within the narrative. While the protagonist is often considered the

primary driver of the plot, many pivotal moments are actually set into motion by secondary figures (Baldick, 2015; Culpeper, 2014; Pasopati et al., 2025). These characters may introduce conflicts, reveal critical information, or create circumstances that compel the protagonist to act. In this sense, they function as catalysts, triggering developments that the main character alone might not achieve. Additionally, minor characters frequently play significant roles in turning points and climactic moments. A seemingly small action, such as a warning, betrayal, or unexpected intervention, can drastically alter the direction of the story (Demmerle, 2021; Kidd & Castano, 2013; Woloch, 2006). These moments often hinge on the presence and decisions of side characters, demonstrating that narrative progression is not solely dependent on the hero. Instead, it emerges from a network of interactions among multiple characters, each contributing to the unfolding of events (Baldick, 2015; Culpeper, 2014; Pasopati et al., 2025).

Beyond their structural contributions, minor characters also serve as emotional anchors within a narrative. They provide depth and relatability by reflecting everyday experiences, vulnerabilities, and interpersonal connections that resonate with audiences. While protagonists are sometimes depicted in extraordinary circumstances, side characters often embody more familiar or grounded perspectives, making them accessible points of identification for readers and viewers (Galef, 2010; Pregent, 2023; Rosen, 2013). Through their relationships with the protagonist and with one another, these characters help to humanize the story. They may offer support, companionship, or even conflict, all of which contribute to the emotional texture of the narrative. Often, the audience's emotional investment is strengthened not only by the hero's journey but also by the presence of these secondary figures (Demmerle, 2021; Kidd & Castano, 2013; Woloch, 2006). Moreover, minor characters often act as conduits for audience empathy. Their struggles, aspirations, and personal dilemmas can evoke strong emotional responses, sometimes even surpassing those elicited by the protagonist (Gardner, 2010; Gaut & Lopes, 2005; Pasopati et al., 2024). By presenting diverse emotional experiences, they broaden the narrative's appeal and encourage audiences to engage with the story on multiple levels. Another vital function of minor characters is to serve as moral and ethical counterpoints to the protagonist. In traditional narratives, the hero is often positioned as the moral center, whose decisions are framed as just or necessary. However, side characters can challenge this assumption by presenting alternative viewpoints and questioning the protagonist's actions (Galef, 2010; Pregent, 2023; Rosen, 2013).

These characters may embody different values, beliefs, or priorities, creating tension and prompting critical reflection within the narrative. For example, a minor character might oppose the protagonist's methods, highlight unintended consequences, or advocate for a different course of action. Such interactions complicate the moral landscape of the story, preventing it from becoming overly simplistic or one-dimensional (Demmerle, 2021; Kidd & Castano, 2013; Woloch, 2006). By offering alternative perspectives, minor characters contribute to a more nuanced exploration of ethical dilemmas. They encourage both the protagonist and the audience to reconsider established assumptions and to recognize the complexity of moral decision-making. In this way, they play a crucial role in expanding the thematic depth of the narrative (Galef, 2010; Pregent, 2023; Rosen, 2013). Minor characters also contribute significantly to the development of the story's world and narrative rhythm. Through their backgrounds, behaviors, and interactions, they offer an understanding of the cultural, social, and environmental context in which the story takes place. These characters often represent different segments of society, allowing the audience to gain a broader understanding of

the narrative setting (Demmerle, 2021; Kidd & Castano, 2013; Woloch, 2006). Furthermore, their presence helps regulate the pacing of the story by introducing moments of relief, tension, or contrast. By shifting focus away from the protagonist at strategic points, minor characters prevent narrative monotony and maintain audience engagement throughout the progression of the plot.

### *Case Studies of Minor and Side Characters*

Several modern and contemporary novels illustrate how minor characters can emerge as powerful narrative forces (Abbott, 2008; Galef, 2010; Pregent, 2020). One notable example is *The Great Gatsby*, where the story is technically centered on Jay Gatsby, yet it is narrated by Nick Carraway. Although Nick may initially appear as a peripheral observer, his perspective ultimately shapes the reader's entire understanding of the narrative. His role demonstrates how a seemingly secondary character can control narrative authority through focalization and selective storytelling. Then, in *Wuthering Heights*, the layered narration through characters like Nelly Dean complicates the hierarchy of importance. Nelly, a housekeeper, functions as both participant and storyteller, blurring the boundaries between major and minor roles. Her interpretations influence how events and characters are perceived, thereby granting her significant narrative power.

Another example is *A Song of Ice and Fire*, a series that deliberately decentralizes the idea of a single hero. Numerous characters, where many initially presented as minor, gain prominence through shifting perspectives. This multi-point-of-view structure allows characters from diverse social, political, and moral backgrounds to shape the story equally (Demmerle, 2021; Martin, 2025; Rosen, 2015). Similarly, *To Kill a Mockingbird* highlights how characters like Boo Radley, though largely absent from the narrative, exert profound thematic influence. Boo's symbolic presence challenges assumptions about morality, prejudice, and empathy. Across these works, narrative techniques such as multiple narrators, shifting focalization, and indirect characterization enable minor characters to gain prominence. These strategies disrupt the dominance of a single protagonist and create a more layered narrative structure (Firzatullah et al., 2025; Greenwood et al., 2021; Reed, 2019).

In cinema, ensemble casts and visual storytelling techniques play a crucial role in elevating side characters. A prominent example is *Pulp Fiction*, directed by Quentin Tarantino. The film employs a nonlinear structure and multiple intersecting storylines, allowing various characters to share narrative importance. No single protagonist dominates; instead, side characters become central within their respective segments. Similarly, *The Grand Budapest Hotel* uses symmetrical framing, color composition, and careful staging to highlight the presence of multiple characters. Director Wes Anderson visually distributes attention across the ensemble, ensuring that even minor figures contribute to the film's aesthetic and narrative richness. In *Crash*, interconnected storylines explore the lives of diverse characters whose paths intersect in meaningful ways. The film's editing emphasizes parallels and contrasts between characters, reinforcing the idea that each individual, no matter how minor, plays a crucial role in the broader narrative. Another example is *Avengers: Endgame*, where a large ensemble of characters shares narrative focus. Cinematography and editing techniques, such as cross-cutting and group framing, ensure that emotional and narrative weight is distributed among multiple figures rather than concentrated on a single hero (Demmerle, 2021; Martin, 2025; Rosen, 2015). In these films, cinematography (camera angles, framing, and

composition) and editing (cross-cutting, pacing, and juxtaposition) are essential in highlighting side characters. By visually directing the audience's attention, filmmakers can elevate minor characters and integrate them meaningfully into the narrative.

Television series, particularly those with long-form storytelling, provide the most fertile ground for the development of minor and side characters. Their extended format allows for gradual character evolution and shifting narrative focus. A key example is *Game of Thrones*, adapted from *A Song of Ice and Fire*. The series is known for its large ensemble cast and frequent shifts in perspective. Characters who initially appear minor, such as Arya Stark, develop into central figures over time. Episodic focus shifts allow different characters to take narrative precedence, challenging the notion of a single protagonist. Another example is *Breaking Evil*. While the story centers on Walter White, side characters like Jesse Pinkman, Gus, and Tuco evolve into complex and emotionally significant figures. The show dedicates entire episodes to their perspectives, enabling audiences to engage deeply with their experiences. *Stranger Things* distributes the narrative across a diverse group of characters, encompassing both children and adults. The series frequently shifts focus between different groups, ensuring that no single character monopolizes the story. This structure highlights the importance of collective experience and interconnected narratives. Then, *The Wire* also exemplifies a fully decentralized narrative. The show explores institutions and communities rather than a single protagonist, with numerous minor characters gaining prominence across different seasons. Each character contributes to a broader and thematic exploration. Through episodic storytelling, television allows for sustained character development and flexible narrative focus (Abbott, 2008; Galef, 2010; Pregent, 2020). By shifting attention between characters, these series demonstrate how minor figures can become central to the narrative over time. Across literature, film, and television, these case studies reveal a common trend: the gradual movement away from rigid, hero-centered storytelling toward more inclusive and decentralized narratives (Abbott, 2008; Galef, 2010; Pregent, 2020). Whether through narrative voice, visual techniques, or episodic structure, minor and side characters are increasingly recognized as vital contributors to storytelling. Their elevation enriches the narrative and reflects a broader shift toward complexity, diversity, and multiplicity in modern narratives.

### ***Re-Evaluating Characters' Importance Within Narrative Structures***

A central implication of this study is the need to reconsider how character importance is defined within narrative structures. Traditional storytelling has long relied on hierarchical categorization, placing the protagonist at the top while assigning minor and side characters subordinate roles (Firzatullah et al., 2025; Greenwood et al., 2021; Reed, 2019). This framework assumes that narrative value is concentrated in a single figure, often overlooking the contributions of other characters. However, such a rigid hierarchy limits the interpretive potential of a story and reinforces a narrow understanding of narrative significance (Galef, 2010; Pregent, 2023; Rosen, 2013).

Moving beyond this model requires a shift toward a more relational perspective, where characters are understood not in isolation but as part of an interconnected system. Each character, regardless of their narrative prominence, contributes to the development of themes, conflicts, and emotional depth. Minor and side characters, in particular, often provide essential context, alternative viewpoints, and subtle influences that shape the trajectory of the narrative (Galef, 2010; Pregent, 2023; Rosen, 2013). Their actions,

interactions, and even absences can have meaningful consequences for the story as a whole.

Recognizing this interconnectedness allows for a more nuanced analysis of storytelling. Rather than asking which character is most important, it becomes more productive to examine how characters function collectively to produce meaning (Demmerle, 2021; Martin, 2025; Rosen, 2015). This approach challenges the assumption that narrative coherence depends on a dominant hero and instead emphasizes the dynamic relationships that exist among all characters. As a result, minor characters can be re-evaluated as integral components of the narrative rather than peripheral additions (Demmerle, 2021; Kidd & Castano, 2013; Woloch, 2006). The re-evaluation of character importance is closely tied to broader changes in contemporary storytelling practices. Increasingly, narratives are moving toward ensemble and decentralized structures that distribute attention across multiple characters (Galef, 2010; Pregent, 2023; Rosen, 2013). In these formats, no single figure monopolizes the narrative; instead, the story unfolds through a network of perspectives and experiences. This shift reflects a growing recognition of complexity and diversity in both fictional worlds and real-life societies.

One of the key drivers of this transformation is the rise of digital media and streaming platforms. Unlike traditional formats with strict time constraints, streaming services allow for extended storytelling, enabling creators to develop multiple characters in depth over longer periods. Episodic and serialized narratives, in particular, provide opportunities to shift focus between characters, giving minor and side figures the space to evolve and gain prominence (Demmerle, 2021; Kidd & Castano, 2013; Woloch, 2006). Furthermore, digital audiences are increasingly receptive to complex narratives that challenge conventional structures. Viewers and readers now expect richer character development, diverse perspectives, and more intricate storytelling. This demand encourages creators to experiment with narrative forms that move beyond the dominance of a single protagonist. In this evolving landscape, the future of narrative storytelling lies in its ability to embrace multiplicity. Ensemble casts, shifting focalization, and decentralized plots are likely to become more prevalent, reflecting a departure from traditional hero-centered models. By valuing all characters as meaningful contributors, contemporary narratives can achieve greater depth, inclusivity, and realism (Galef, 2010; Pregent, 2023; Rosen, 2013). That is why this shift redefines the role of minor characters and transforms the very foundations of storytelling itself.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that minor and side characters have a major impact on determining narrative meaning, development, and complexity. Their presence challenges the assumption that the protagonist is the sole center of narrative significance. Through qualitative textual analysis and a deconstructive perspective, the study shows that character importance is not fixed in a strict hierarchy but is formed through relationships, interactions, and narrative functions. Minor characters contribute beyond traditional supporting roles. They act as catalysts for conflict, reveal important information, influence turning points, and deepen emotional engagement. They also serve as moral and ethical counterpoints that challenge the protagonist's choices and enrich the audience's interpretation of the story. In addition, they strengthen world-building by representing diverse social, cultural, and ideological perspectives. The study also finds that various narrative techniques can elevate minor characters and reduce the dominance of the hero. These techniques include multiple narrators, shifting focalization, ensemble

casts, nonlinear structures, episodic storytelling, and visual strategies. Works such as *The Great Gatsby*, *Wuthering Heights*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Game of Thrones*, *The Wire*, *Breaking Bad*, *Stranger Things*, *Pulp Fiction*, *Crash*, *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, and *Avengers: Endgame* demonstrate that narrative significance can be distributed among several characters. Overall, recognizing minor characters as active contributors makes narratives more inclusive, realistic, and thematically rich. Meaning is produced collectively through interconnected characters rather than being centered only on the protagonist. Future research is recommended to examine minor characters in non-Western narratives and to apply interdisciplinary approaches from psychology, sociology, and media studies to better understand audience responses to these characters.

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