How are minor characters important to the plot of Romeo and Juliet?

In Romeo and Juliet we first see action happening through minor characters and this could suggest they are very important in helping to tell us what happens in the play. The exposition of the play involves servants, Benvolio introduces us with the Montague family to the main protagonist Romeo and we first see Juliet with her nurse. This suggests minor characters help to influence what we think, feel and see in the play and about the main characters.

Firstly, Benvolio is a friend of Romeo’s who cares about him and wants to help him. When Lady Montague enquires using the hyperbolic statement “tears augmenting the morning dew” about Romeo’s dismal, upset and sorrowful behaviour; it is Benvolio who offers to find out what is wrong with Romeo. Furthermore, Benvolio acts as a peacekeeper during the fight in the opening scene just prior to his conversation with the Montagues showing he is loyal, trustworthy and respected by the Montague family. He uses the imperative “Put up your swords; you know not what you do” to demand that the fight stops. Perhaps, this is fear of another brawl causing trouble for his friend Romeo. Romeo is in a bad emotional way and maybe Benvolio is scared that he will get involved in the fighting as he is not his normal self. Benvolio acting as the peacekeeper therefore suggests he is important and could be Shakespeare’s way of showing that not all young men have to act rashly; instead they can be considerate and use their brains to make a decision. Later on in the play Benvolio again shows consideration for peace using adjectives “mad blood stirring” to suggest that Tybalt is not going to walk away from a fight. The connotations of mad are crazy, unstable and impulsive, which are characteristics we have seen in Romeo, Tybalt and Mercutio. Here, again we see Benvolio making a point about the action and the characters showing he is important to the story.

This links to another important minor character in the play: Tybalt. He is Juliet’s cousin, angry, hot-headed and incredibly angry at the Montagues. Ironically “Prince of Cats” is used to describe him implying he should have nine lives but Romeo in a fit of temper kills him “I am dead” which is anti-climactic in comparison to Mercutio’s cursing of both families with “a plague on both your houses”. Perhaps, Mercutio and Tybalt are foils of each other, representing the same type of behaviour from both houses, showing that Shakespeare may have tried to highlight the similarities in the Capulets and the Montagues by choosing to create two opposing characters with similar attributes. A “plague” is a terrible fate which has biblical connotations relating to terrible events and also connotations of disease and death so here Mercutio’s lines may highlight religious attitudes and fears people had relating to evil.

This links to a different type of minor character: The Nurse. She is not seen as evil or