

Five Hilarious Side Characters in Television

Introduction by Ben Plunkett

Why should the main characters of the great sitcoms get all the glory? Well, in most cases the main characters of these great shows deserve a lot of it because they are, like, main. But there are truly great and equally as hilarious side characters. They should not be so callously ignored and brushed to the side of our comedic subconscious. The best of them add much to the hilarity and substance of the show. Today's Five pays honor to five great and hilarious side characters in T.V. history.



Floyd Lawson – The Andy Griffith Show

Floyd Lawson is a barber, supposedly. We rarely see him actually cutting hair, but he does hang out in the barber shop a lot. At least, when he is not sitting outside on a bench with Gomer, or Goober, or Andy. Or at the Court House hanging out with Barney and Andy. Or doing who knows what else. Floyd leads a simple life. A quiet life. He occasionally cuts hair and spends the rest of his time with his friends. And for

that, I love Floyd. But mainly, I love Floyd because he is a complete lunatic living right in the middle of Mayberry. Based on some of the other citizens of that fair town (Ernest T. Bass, Gomer, Goober, The Darlings), it's not surprising he blends right in. Still, he's crazy and listening to him talk about...anything is one of my favorite things on any show. His dramatic reactions. His wacky conspiracy theories. His soft-spoken nuttury just make my heart smile. I have no idea if Floyd Lawson was a good barber, but I am sure he was a great character on an iconic television show. (Phill Lytle)

Ethel Mertz – I Love Lucy



When one thinks of *I Love Lucy*, in all likelihood Lucille Balle (AKA Lucy Ricardo) instantly springs to mind. And there is absolutely no denying that she deserves so much praise for this role. Lucy was one of the funniest T.V. characters of all time, portrayed by one of the funniest women of all time. However, although her high accolades are very well deserved, her great shadow too often obscures a perfect sidekick and comedic partner. I speak, of course, of the great Ethel Mertz. Ethel was frumpy, oldish, simple, and kind of drab. It says a lot about her that she was once disappointed not to get an iron for her birthday. All of this made Ethel (Vivianne Vance) an incredibly odd best friend for the young, good-looking,

full of life, and totally insane Lucy. Plus, Ethel could sing really well and Lucy famously could not sing a lick.

But as simple a life that she much preferred, Ethel grudgingly but always with great humor went along with just about all of Lucy's crazy schemes. As different as the two were, the truly loved each other. That was very evident. Like sisters, they were constantly getting into fights but in every single such instance, they were always weepingly apologizing in a very short time. Ethel's brand of pure comedy complimented her BFF to such a level that it highlighted and accentuated Lucy's funniness. (Ben Plunkett)



Richmond Avenal – The IT Crowd

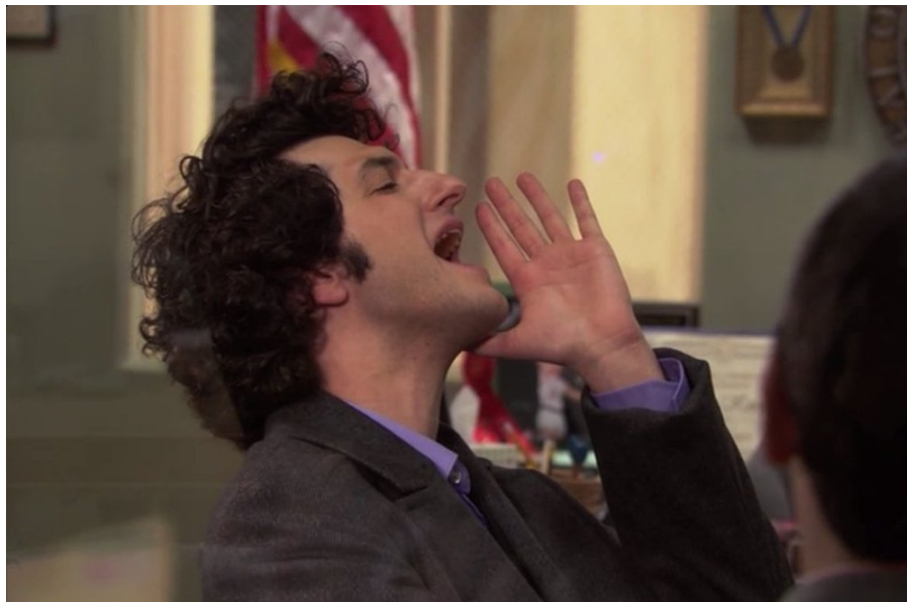
“I mean, I don’t know what any of this stuff even does. What’s going on there? I don’t know. Is it good that it’s doing that? Usually, it doesn’t do that. And I think I should tell them, but often I just look away. And this one: Flash. Flash. Flash. Then wait for it. Nothing for a while. Here it comes. Double flash. Brilliant.”

And with that quote, I think I fully began to appreciate the brilliance that is Richmond Avenal. Weird. Random. Could be Tim Burton. Richmond could be creepy and hilarious at the same time, as when he tells a woman, “When you laugh I can see the

outline of your skull”.

The IT Crowd is a hidden gem of a show to me and Moss, Roy, Jen, Douglas and Denholm all play their parts superbly. But Richmond joins a pantheon of characters that didn't appear in every episode, but made every scene they were in funnier. Whether he was hiding on the ceiling or pontificating about why the gang shouldn't go to the theater (“I trod on a piece of lego, 0 it went right in the heel”), he had us in stitches. He truly deserves to be on this short list. (Gowdy Cannon)

Jean-Ralphio Saperstein – Parks and Recreation



There are some characters that only work in small doses. Jean-Ralphio is the textbook example of such a character. Through his unbridled bravado, his terrible rhymes, and his abject lack of discipline, self awareness, or life goals (outside of strongly desiring to be rich and famous though having no discernible skills), Jean-Ralphio comes on strong. Too strong if the show was centered around his character. Fortunately, the writers of *Parks and Rec* know exactly how utilize him to get the biggest laughs without overstaying their welcome. Throughout the show – from his introductory scene where he sings about being “Flushed with cash!” after the death of a disliked relative, to his absurd business venture,

Entertainment 720 with Tom Haveford – the writers unleash Jean-Ralphio as a little comedy grenade, perfectly thrown into the mix to make good scenes better.

Jean-Ralphio would be the worst sort of person to be friends with in real life. Fortunately, a sitcom is not real life and his absurd confidence and absolute smarminess work perfectly in a fictionalized setting. In a show like *Parks and Recreation*, already populated with dozens of insane characters, Jean-Ralphio is so insane, so unpredictable, and so funny that he stands out and brings giant laughs every minute he is on the screen. (Phill Lytle)



Mary Lightly
– **Psych**

Not counting the Musical and the Movie, Mary is only in three episodes of *Psych*...the Yang Trilogy. Yet without a doubt this portrayal of a serial killer expert by Jimmi Simpson is my favorite – and the funniest – secondary character of any TV show I've ever watched. Whether he's telling Gus "That's very good, Gustus," running with ankle weights or donning a monkey ascot, Mary has made me laugh extremely hard. I don't know that there is any thing he says or any gesture he makes that isn't funny to me. He's subtle and overt, random and calculating, creepy and warm all at the same time. It's a true masterpiece of a role.

My favorite Mary moment is actually a montage of himself on video, that Shawn and Gus watch in "Yang 3 in 2D". The video keeps changing scenes of Mary talking to himself.

"Day One, Hour One. What's the deal with One Tree Hill? It's like a poorly executed Dawson's Creek..."

Jasper peaks, arrows and bows, the tickle of a good friend's nose, a tom tom filled with Spaghetti-O's...

I think CGI has ruined storytelling for all of us. [Gus: Is he wearing a onesie? Shawn: Yes.] I don't wanna say it's completely Michael Bay's fault but that guy needs to be stopped because it's all his fault..."

I don't know how he does it, but there is something about Mary. He kills me every scene he's in. (Gowdy Cannon)

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