

The Nurse

Key Themes

- Chance/fate
- Youth
- Individuals vs society
- Family vs duty
- Violence
- Love

Key Words/Phrases

- Maternal (motherly) figure to Juliet
- Nostalgic (thinking about the past fondly)
- Excessive adoration for Juliet
- Frivolous (unserious)
- Melodramatic (over the top)
- Comic relief (brief bit of comedy for the audience)
- Parody (humour exaggeration) of the working class
- Bawdy (sexual) language

Shakespeare's intentions

- Shakespeare shows the excessive adoration of the Nurse towards Juliet to juxtapose it with the emotionally conservative relationship between Juliet and her mother. This helps to accentuate the tragic undertones of familial feuds and emphasises the ease Juliet had in **renouncing** (abandoning) her lineage.
- The Nurse is constructed by Shakespeare as a parody of the working class, and therefore provides **comic relief** for his audience. Her melodramatic and bawdy language provides a brief escape from the **bleak, tragic themes that permeate (spread) the play**.

“Wast the prettiest babe that e’er ...nursed”

Link to main key themes:

- Youth
- Family
- Love

Analysis

- **Superlative “prettiest”**: The **superlative** (exaggerated adjective) emphasises an almost **excessive adoration**, suggesting a **bond that goes beyond duty** for the nurse and her pure adoration for Juliet. She speaks fondly and with a sense of **nostalgia**, reminiscing about Juliet's childhood as if she were her own daughter.
- This **maternal and emotional bond is starkly contrasted** with the emotional separation between Juliet and Lady Capulet.
- **Context: Aristocratic** (people highest in society) **Elizabethans** would have their children raised by **wet nurses**, who would breastfeed them in place of their mothers and nanny them. This is the relationship the Nurse has with Juliet; it is extremely **maternal** (mother-like), more so that the relationship Juliet has with her own mother.

“What lamb! What ladybird!”

Link to main key themes:

- **Individual vs society**

Analysis

- **Exclamative sentence:** The Nurse's is often **frivolous (unserious) and melodramatic** (over the top) which is evident in her opening line of the play, "What lamb! What ladybird!" The **exclamatory tone** establishes her character as excitable and prone to rambling.
- **Paragon (perfect-example) of the working class:** In Shakespeare's plays, the working class characters are often **ridiculed** (mocked), depicted as lacking intelligence, and utilised as **comic relief**. Therefore, the Nurse's use of **bawdy** (sexual) and animated language provides a brief escape from the **bleak, tragic themes that permeate (spread) the play**.
- As the only prominent character from the working class, the Nurse serves as a representation of Shakespeare's perception of this social class. By **parodying** (humorously exaggerating) her character, Shakespeare indirectly **parodies the working class as a whole**.