

## KEY WORDS

*Material gains, Primary carer, Maternal, Colloquial, Hyperbolic, Surrogate, Working class, Rambling, Bawdy, Comic relief, Blank verse, Parodies.*

# The Nurse

## THE NURSE AS A SUBSTITUTE MATERNAL FIGURE FOR JULIET

- Juliet's mother provides her with minimal **emotional support**, often prioritising **material gains** over her daughter's happiness, like in her arranged marriage to Paris for example. The Nurse, however, fulfils this role in the **absence** of Juliet's mother.
- The Nurse uses **fond** language to speak of Juliet as a child, saying that she **wast the prettiest babe that [she] e'er [...]** **nursed**. Her tone is fond, and she speaks **retrospectively**, reminding the audience that she was Juliet's **primary carer** when she was a **"babe"**.
- Aristocratic 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.
- In a later scene, the nurse is sent to investigate Romeo and find out his feelings towards Juliet. She warns that Juliet is **young**, **and therefore, if [he] should deal double with her, truly it were an ill thing**. The **alliterative** language she uses in **deal double** creates a harsh **plosive** sound, which makes her appear **standoffish** (confrontational) towards Romeo. It shows her to be protective of Juliet, in a way her own mother is not.
- She returns and playfully complains **how my bones ache!**. She is **colloquial** (informal) with Juliet in her tone. Juliet uses, **primarily**, a very formal tone with her mother but with the nurse she is unfiltered and so is the nurse to her. This demonstrates that the nurse provides Juliet with an environment in which she is free to express her emotions because she expresses her own, unlike Juliet's mother.
- Furthermore, when she finds Juliet dead, she is as upset as Juliet's mother is, lamenting **never was seen so black a day as this**. She is **hyperbolic** in her mourning. Shakespeare uses a **metaphor** here with "black a day" which reflects the nurse's intense grief.
- The nurse is essentially a **surrogate** (substitute) mother for Juliet as she provides her with all that her biological mother lacks.

## COMPARISON

In comparison to Lady Capulet, the nurse is far more supportive to Juliet. She reminds the audience of all the key maternal traits that Lady Capulet lacks and her folly, which is prioritising financial and material gains over her daughter's happiness.



## THE NURSE AS A PARODY OF THE WORKING CLASS

### COMPARISON

The nurse is far more frivolous and un-intelligent in her ramblings compared to other characters of higher class which shows Shakespeare's perception of the working class, that they are un-intelligent.

- The nurse is the main representation of the **working class** in *Romeo and Juliet*. Thus, she is inherently a symbol of this class of people during this era as she is its only representation. The nurse is often frivolous and melodramatic. She exclaims ***what lamb! What ladybird!***. This is one of her opening lines of the play and it establishes her, as a character to be **excitable** and **rambling** in her exclamative tone and language which has a semantic field of animals, connoting endearment.
- She rambles, ending with ***and, pretty fool, it stinted and said "ay"*** before she is cut off by Lady Capulet. She speaks in **prose** which makes her sound **colloquial** (informal) and also the conjunction ***and*** reinforces how rambling and over-expressive she is.
- Shakespeare uses these techniques to mock the nurse and her class by extension, making it so she is the main comic relief of the play.
- She is also often **bawdy** (sexual) in her language, especially when she says ***now, by my maidenhead at twelve year old***. This is another factor which reinforces her position as comic relief and intensifies the way that Shakespeare Parodies her.
- The working class, in Shakespeare's play's are frequently mocked, shown to be un-intelligent and act as **comic relief**. **The Porter in Macbeth** is a classic example of this and here the nurse plays a similar role. She is melodramatic and frivolous, all qualities which cause the audience to laugh at her.
- Because the Nurse is the **sole (only) prominent character who is of working class**, she is inherently a representation of how Shakespeare views this class of people and in parodying her, he **parodies** the working class by extension.



## TOPIC SENTENCES

- In the **absence** of (without) a supportive **maternal figure**, the Nurse fulfils this role for Juliet, providing her with emotional guidance and maternal love.
- Through the character of the nurse, Shakespeare creates a **parody** (joke) of the working class.