

Romeo and Juliet

How does Shakespeare present the relationship of Juliet and the Nurse in this play?

Throughout the course of the unravelling of the play *Romeo and Juliet*, William Shakespeare explores a multitude of themes including the concept of youth, conflict, love and the generational divide all within 15th century society. The characters of both the Nurse and Juliet are utilised to express and interweave these themes together and help the audience navigate the plot through their relationship and the Nurse's involvement with Juliet's love.

The audience is first introduced to the Nurse and Juliet's relationship during a conversation about her possible marriage to Paris when she is deemed 'ripe' to be a bride. The Nurse provides a comedic relief to this otherwise tense conversation as she enters with a funny long dialogue of nonsense which is visualised on the stage. The audience learns that the Nurse 'wean'd' Juliet and sense their close bond whilst additionally referencing the norms of the time with families of high standard and 'dignity' employing a wet nurse. The fact that the Nurse expresses her 'wish' to see Juliet marry enhances the notion that the Nurse cares about her and wants her to be happy. This is further emphasised by the sense of a cold relationship between Lady Capulet and Juliet when she asks the Nurse to 'give us leave' but changes her mind immediately as she does not want to be alone with her child.

Furthermore, the relationship between Juliet and the Nurse can also be interpreted as being used as a device by Shakespeare to convey the theme of the generational divide which ripples lightly throughout the play. As Juliet waits impatiently for the Nurse to return from conversing with Romeo, Juliet wishes that the Nurse has more 'youthful blood' as she wanted her to move faster as a go-between. This contrast of youth and the older generation creates a subtle notion of the overarching background theme of how the 'ancient grudge' between the older generation has been passed down to the youth creating a catalyst for further tensions. Ultimately, it is this divide and these tensions which account for the truly tragic end to the two Petrarchan lovers, Romeo and Juliet. Therefore, the physical idea that Juliet is deprived of hearing news about Romeo because of the age of the Nurse echoes this concept.

Additionally, the relationship between the Nurse and Juliet may be deemed to be one of a maternal nature as the act of protectiveness of the Nurse over Juliet is expressed. As the Nurse warns Romeo of leading Juliet into a 'fools paradise' we witness, as an audience, the depth of love the two share which mirrors the tone of the plot. The motherly characterisation enhances the bond portrayed through the show of care which a mother would typically demonstrate.

By contrast, although the close relationship between the two is clearly established, it may be inferred that the Nurse plays a role in the ultimate downfall of the 'star-crossed lovers'. The idea that the Nurse acts as a catalyst for the whirlwind romance resulting in their death is formed through the Nurse's

encouragement. This indicates that although the Nurse may act as a maternal figure, her immaturity and lack of understanding make the relationship one of instability as she truly does not understand her role in Juliet's life. Although she is aware of the fact that Juliet's 'grave is like to be' her 'wedding bed', she continues to allow and even aid Juliet in her youthful defiance. The fact that Juliet foresees her own death and uses the word 'grave' is lost on the Nurse as she fails to understand the danger and encourages the union despite knowing that Romeo is a Montague.

Lastly, as a result of this continued encouragement by the Nurse, Juliet feels a sense of betrayal when the Nurse acts to finally dissuade her. Juliet declares to the audience that the Nurse is 'a wicked fiend' for telling her to choose Paris as a husband as this match 'excels' her first match, Romeo. As an audience, we can see the dilemma that young women of the time were faced with. They were expected to marry and into a good family of their father's choosing. The Nurse has encouraged Juliet to go against this and marry for love but has now followed the societal norm in encouraging her to marry Paris. This last act from the Nurse is then seen to have spurred Juliet to take her own life as she no longer feels she is supported and believes her only escape is death with Romeo. She feels that the relationship between herself and the Nurse was based on false hopes and not reality and this sways her decision to find the Friar.

In conclusion, the relationship between the Nurse and Juliet runs throughout the play and references the many themes within it. Shakespeare presents to two almost as best friends even though the Nurse is much older and therefore should be much wiser. Her indulgence of Juliet's fantasy relationship with Romeo and her inability to see the language cues from Juliet about the fate of the relationship highlight the fact that Juliet needed a wiser counsel during this time. The final irony is that when the Nurse becomes more responsible, it is too late. Shakespeare's clever depiction of the relationship between the Nurse and Juliet helps us understand the themes of the play but also to see that the death of the two lovers was inevitable. **(919 words)**