

S K E N È

Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies

8:2 2022

Nutrix

Edited by Rosy Colombo

SKENÈ Journal of Theatre and Drama Studies

Founded by Guido Avezzù, Silvia Bigliazzi, and Alessandro Serpieri

<i>Executive Editor</i>	Guido Avezzù.
<i>General Editors</i>	Guido Avezzù, Silvia Bigliazzi.
<i>Editorial Board</i>	Simona Brunetti, Nicola Pasqualicchio, Susan Payne, Cristiano Ragni, Emanuel Stelzer, Gherardo Ugolini.
<i>Managing Editors</i>	Valentina Adami, Emanuel Stelzer.
<i>Assistant Managing Editor</i>	Roberta Zanoni, Marco Duranti.
<i>Book Review Editors</i>	Chiara Battisti, Sidia Fiorato.
<i>Staff</i>	Petra Bjelica, Francesco Dall'Olio, Bianca Del Villano, Serena Demichelis, Marco Duranti, Carina Louise Fernandes, Leonardo Mancini, Antonietta Provenza, Savina Stevanato, Carla Suthren.
<i>Typesetters</i>	Martina Passanante, Cristiano Ragni.
<i>Advisory Board</i>	Anna Maria Belardinelli, Anton Bierl, Enoch Brater, Richard Allen Cave, Jean-Christophe Cavallin, Rosy Colombo, Claudia Corti, Marco De Marinis, Tobias Döring, Pavel Drábek, Paul Edmondson, Keir Douglas Elam, Ewan Fernie, Patrick Finglass, Enrico Giaccherini, Mark Griffith, Daniela Guardamagna, Stephen Halliwell, Robert Henke, Pierre Judet de la Combe, Eric Nicholson, Guido Paduano, Franco Perrelli, Didier Plassard, Donna Shalev, Susanne Wofford.

Copyright © 2022 SKENÈ
Published in December 2022
All rights reserved.
ISSN 2421-4353

The Journal is a CC-BY 4.0 publication
(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)
SKENÈ Theatre and Drama Studies
<https://skenejournal.skeneproject.it>
info@skeneproject.it

Dir. Resp. (aut. Trib. di Verona): Guido Avezzù
P.O. Box 149 c/o Mail Boxes Etc. (MBE150) – Viale Col. Galliano, 51, 37138, Verona (I)

Contents

Nutrix

Edited by Rosy Colombo

ROSY COLOMBO – <i>Foreword</i>	5
NANCY FELSON – <i>Eurycleia: The Odyssey’s Best Supporting Character</i>	9
ANNA BELTRAMETTI – <i>The Nurse from Narrative to Drama: Euripides and the Tragic Deviations of an Ancient Anthropological Figure</i>	33
RONALD BLANKENBORG – <i>Bridging the Gap with Epic: the Nurse in Euripides’ Medea</i>	57
IVAN SPURIO VENARUCCI – <i>One, None and a Hundred-Thousand. The Nutrix in Seneca’s Phaedra: a Blend of Roles and Literary Genres</i>	79
ANNALISA PERROTTA – <i>“Speak; I will listen”. The Body and the Words in the Dialogue with the Nurse in Sixteenth-Century Italian Tragedy</i>	97
MATTEO BOSISIO – <i>When the Nurse Dies</i>	121
KATARZYNA BURZYŃSKA – <i>Wet Nurses’ (In)visible Presences. Ethics of Care and Dependency Critique in Selected Early Modern English Dramas</i>	147
TERRI BOURUS – <i>“Speak’st thou from thy heart?”: Performing the Mother-Nurse and Clown-Servant in Romeo and Juliet</i>	169
DELIA GAMBELLI – <i>The Nurse in Racine’s Phèdre. Between Imagination and Innovation</i>	197
FRANCESCO PUCCIO – <i>In the Shadow of Phaedra. The Nurse on Stage between Euripides, Seneca and Marina Cvetaeva</i>	225
MADELEINE SCHERER – <i>Memories of Antiquity in Derek Walcott’s Odyssey: A Stage Version. A Case Study of Eurycleia</i>	247

Special Section

KEIR ELAM – <i>Maria Del Sapio Garbero, Shakespeare’s Ruins and Myth of Rome. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2021. ISBN 9780367559106, pp. 404</i>	273
SERENA GUARRACINO – <i>Michael Billington, Affair of the Heart. British Theatre 1992 to 2020. London - New York - Oxford - New Delhi - Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2022. ISBN 9781350214774, pp. 344</i>	281
DIONA ESPINOSA – <i>Acting the Private, Intimate, and Public Body of Cuba. Review of Bretton White’s Staging Discomfort: Performance and Queerness in Contemporary Cuba. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2020. ISBN 9781683401544, pp. 258</i>	285
GHERARDO UGOLINI – <i>The Ghost of Iphigenia and Oedipus on the Stairs: Ancient Theatre Festival - Syracuse 2022</i>	293
MARK BROWN – <i>From Auteur Directors to Mask Masters: Festival de Almada 2022</i>	309

TERRI BOURUS*

“Speak’st thou from thy heart?”: Performing the Mother-Nurse and Clown-Servant in *Romeo and Juliet*¹

Abstract

Mothers are notoriously rare in Shakespeare. Juliet has a living, onstage mother, but the most important older woman and mother-figure in her life is the Nurse. Unlike any other Nurse in Shakespeare’s plays, such as the Nurse in *Titus Andronicus*, or, for that matter, any other Nurse character in early modern English plays, Juliet’s Nurse is a fully developed and emotionally complicated character. She has her own backstory, including the death of her own named child. She is given a remarkable idiolect along with a fully developed sexuality and corporeality. She is Juliet’s alternative mother, and as central to the plot and the emotional arc of *Romeo and Juliet* as Bottom is to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. And yet, she stands alone among Shakespeare’s servant-class characters, providing comic relief, dramatic interest and tension, and a deep and loving connection to the family she serves and the Italian community of which she is an integral part. This essay situates the character within widespread, normative medieval and early modern practices of wet-nursing and surrogate motherhood. It examines the uniqueness of Juliet’s Nurse in the context of other early modern ‘nurse’ characters and the long history of remarkable theatrical and cinematic interpretations of the role. It also specifically connects the Nurse to her companion servant in the Capulet household, Peter, played in the first performances by the great English clown, Will Kemp.

KEYWORDS: nurse; surrogate motherhood; *Romeo and Juliet*; clown; Shakespeare

How should we interpret, in reading or in performance, the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*? If she was brought into the Capulet family as a wet-nurse, we might ask, what functions did a wet-nurse serve in sixteenth-century England or Italy? Juliet was weaned years ago, and the Nurse is no longer performing the duty that the noun implies. So is she now primarily just a servant in the household? If so, what kind of servant? Is her past as a wet-nurse less important than her present as a stereotypical comic servant, a

¹I am indebted to the invaluable knowledge, experience, and generosity of Labor & Delivery nurse Domenica Bourus, BSN, and Lactation Consultant Julie Meek, IBCLC. I also want to thank four readers of an earlier draft: Gary Taylor, Rosy Colombo, and the two anonymous peer-reviewers for the journal.

* Florida State University - terri.bourus@fsu.edu

theatrical clown? Or is she not a clown at all? Could she be, instead, an alternative mother? Could any wet-nurse, in such a rigid hierarchical system, become a substitute parent?

Tom Stoppard, in his 1998 Academy Award-winning *Shakespeare in Love*, addresses some of these questions by giving us two different Nurses.² Viola De Lesseps' unnamed Nurse, played with energetic comic perfection by Imelda Staunton, and the camp Nurse in the play-within-the-movie, acted in high Elizabethan style by Jim Carter, now better known for his role as the indomitable butler, Charles Carson, in *Downton Abbey* (and Staunton's real-life husband). Staunton and Carter shared, with ten other members of the cast, a well-earned Best Ensemble Award from the Screen Actors Guild.

The two nurses in *Shakespeare in Love* epitomize two very different ways of performing Shakespeare's single Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*. Staunton's Nurse is a servant in the fictional De Lessep household: we first hear her speak when she is alone with her charge, Viola, in Viola's bedroom, after they have both witnessed a performance at court of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. The film adaptation introduces the nurse character by emphasizing her physical duties in the maintenance of a rich young woman's body: helping Viola undress, cleaning her ears, giving her a twig to brush her teeth with, and then holding a beaker of water and bowl for her to spit into (20-2). This emphasis continues throughout *Shakespeare in Love*, and corresponds to the practicality always evident in the Nurse's speeches. But such actions also establish the personal intimacy between the young rich mistress and her older, laboring servant. In Shakespeare's play, the Nurse initially speaks with Juliet's biological mother, and Juliet only joins them when the Nurse (at the mother's command) summons her. By contrast, Staunton's Nurse is alone with her mistress: the mother is not present at all, and there is no talk about Viola's birth, or the Nurse breast-feeding her, or weaning her, and nothing about the Nurse's own history, her dead child or dead husband. Although the film retains her identity as 'Nurse', in practice she is simply a personal servant, consistently loyal to Viola. Like everyone else in the film, she's funny, and Staunton's performance makes her continuously specific, sympathetic, and interesting. But unlike Shakespeare's Nurse, the film's Nurse is not verbally vulgar, she seems as asexual as a nun, and she does not, in any way, mix tragedy with comedy.

Jim Carter's Nurse is an entirely different animal. In the film, Carter is

² Stoppard 1998. In the film, the screenplay is credited to "Marc Norman & Tom Stoppard". Although Norman had the initial idea for the film, and is responsible for the first scene, Stoppard wrote almost everything else. "By the convention of credits, 'and,' as opposed to '&,' signals that the two writers have worked separately, one subsequently to the other, and not in collaboration" (Lee 2021, 444).

Ralph Bashford, a player in Alleyn's and Henslowe's acting company. We see Ralph repeatedly in the company of the other actors, on stage or backstage (juggling) and running lines, but also in a brothel/tavern with other theatre people. He refuses offered alcohol ("Never when I'm working!") and tries to impress a "pretty" young woman by summarizing the story of *Romeo and Juliet* in a way that makes it all about himself and the character he plays ("Well, there's this . . . Nurse").³ Throughout the film, Stoppard affectionately satirizes the theatre as an art-form, a business, and a community somehow formed ("it's a mystery") by professional narcissists. Ralph is part of that community. On stage, the big-bodied baritone, cross-dressed and with pale overdone make-up, Carter/Ralph consistently plays the Nurse for laughs. With such casting, the actor Ralph is 'real', but Ralph cannot possibly disappear into the character of the fictive Nurse: what we see and hear is a male actor comically playing, or mis-playing, a caricature of a woman. In contrast to the comedy of Staunton as the Nurse, the comedy of Carter's Nurse is fundamentally metatheatrical: we cannot ignore, but instead relish, the obvious misfit between actor and role. The film requires Staunton's Nurse to be a believable specific character; it requires Carter's Nurse to be a conspicuously theatrical parody of theatrical make-believe.

That dichotomy - between Staunton's Nurse and Carter's Nurse, between 'real' and 'metatheatrical' - can be seen in the long history of performed interpretations of Shakespeare's Nurse. But before looking at particular embodiments of the role from the Restoration to the present, it is worth calling attention to a fundamental difference in the Nurses of *Shakespeare in Love* and the Nurse of *Romeo and Juliet*. Staunton's Nurse and Carter's Nurse, or even both together, are smaller roles, less complex and less important to the story, than Shakespeare's singular Nurse.

1. Tracing the Role

The titular lovers have naturally been the focus of performances and commentaries on the play. But in the first extended analysis of Shakespeare by a major writer, John Dryden declared that "*Shakespear* show'd the best of his skill in his *Mercutio*" (Dryden 1978, 215), and in the centuries since 1672 critics and editors have paid more attention to *Mercutio* than to any of the other secondary characters. This male emphasis on *Mercutio* should surprise us.

³ Stoppard 1998, 104, 106. The screenplay has no ellipsis, or any other punctuation, between "this" and "Nurse", but in the film Carter conspicuously pauses between the two words, calling attention to the comic disparity between any summary of *Romeo and Juliet* that we might expect ("there's this feud" or "there's this young couple") and his own self-centered emphasis. The pause seems to be Carter's own contribution.

The Nurse speaks more than anyone but Romeo (4,677 words), Juliet (4,271), and Friar Lawrence (2,725). In the canonical text of *Romeo and Juliet*, first published in the second quarto edition (1599) and essentially reprinted in the 1623 Folio, Mercutio speaks 2,093 words, but the Nurse speaks 2,205. She also appears in more scenes, interacts with a greater range of characters, and remains important long after Mercutio's death. But what should be the most telling and surprising quantitative contrast with the Nurse is not Mercutio. Juliet's biological mother speaks only 874 words: less than 40% of what the Nurse speaks.⁴ The Nurse, though socially inferior to Juliet's mother, is more important to Juliet and more important to the play. None of the other nurse characters in Shakespeare come anywhere near the size of her role. The unnamed Nurse in *Titus Andronicus* speaks only 136 words, and Lychorida in *Pericles* only seventy-four (Spevack 1968, 331, 1457). The unnamed Nurse in *Henry the Sixth, Part Three* does not speak at all: she is specified in the opening stage direction of the play's final scene, where she apparently carries the infant Prince Edward, the Lancastrian dynasty's newborn heir. In all these other plays, the biological mothers (Tamora, Thaisa, Elizabeth) speak many more words, and spend more time on stage, than the nurses.

The importance of the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* is not simply quantitative. Mothers are notoriously rare in Shakespeare, and yet Juliet has two. She has a living, talking, onstage, biological mother and, the most important older woman and mother-figure in her life, her Nurse. Like the play's other main characters - and unlike the servants Peter, Samson, Gregory, and Abraham - the Nurse has an Italian name, Angelica.⁵ When Capulet, her master, addresses her as "good Angelica", the name suggests both a guardian angel and a culinary herb; both senses emphasize her "nurturing, comforting role within the Capulet household" (Bate 1982, 336; Findlay 2010, 217). She has her own backstory, including the death of her own named child. She is given a remarkable idiolect along with a fully developed sexuality and corporeality. She is Juliet's alternative mother, and as central to the plot and the emotional arc of *Romeo and Juliet* as Bottom is to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Of all Shakespeare's comic characters, three stand out and are most familiar to audiences: Bottom in *Dream*, Falstaff in *Merry Wives* and *Henry IV*, and Juliet's Nurse. Like Falstaff to Hal, the Nurse is an alternative parent, but she is the *only* comic woman in this memorable triad. She stands alone among

⁴ These statistics come from Spevack 1968, 406-71. Weis mistakenly identifies Capulet as "the fourth-longest part in the play" (2012, 4), but Capulet speaks only 2121 words (Spevack, 410). That's more than Mercutio, and far more than Capulet's wife, but less than the Nurse.

⁵ Shakespeare 2016, 21, 5. All quotations from the play cite the New Oxford Shakespeare edition, which uses continuous scene numbering, rather than imposing eighteenth-century act divisions on the play.

Shakespeare's servant-class characters: like them, she often provides comic relief, but she also creates dramatic interest and tension, and displays a deep and loving connection to the family she serves and the Italian community of which she is an integral part. Stanley Wells calls her "the most complete character in the play" (Wells 1996, 13).

Consider the qualitative judgements of the Nurse by three exemplary, but very different, critics from the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries:

The Nurse is one of the characters in which the author delighted: he has, with great subtilty of distinction, drawn her at once loquacious and secret, obsequious and insolent, trusty and dishonest. (Samuel Johnson)⁶

Were any man to attempt to paint in his mind all the qualities that could possibly belong to a nurse, he would find them there. . . . in the Nurse you had all the garrulity of old age, and all the fondness, which was one of the greatest consolations of humanity. . . . You had likewise the arrogance of ignorance, with the pride of real meanness at being connected with a great family; the grossness too . . . and, arising from that grossness, the little low vices belonging to it . . . (Samuel Coleridge)⁷

The Nurse, whatever her age, is a triumphant and complete achievement. She stands foursquare, and lives and breathes in her own right from the moment she appears. . . . [Shakespeare] will give us nothing completer till he gives us Falstaff. . . . You may, indeed, take any sentence the Nurse speaks throughout the play, and only she could speak it. . . . She is in everything inevitable. (Harley Granville-Barker)⁸

Or, from a very different perspective, consider responses to two famous London productions of *Romeo and Juliet*. In 1882 at the Lyceum, the lovers were played by the most celebrated English actors of the Victorian age, Henry Irving (Romeo) and Ellen Terry (Juliet). But Mercutio and the Nurse "were the popular successes" of the show.⁹

⁶ Johnson 1968, 957. Notably, Johnson devoted only these three lines to the Nurse, after giving nineteen to Mercutio as an exemplar of "the conversation of gentlemen" (956).

⁷ Coleridge 1971, 79. Like Johnson, Coleridge discussed Mercutio before the Nurse.

⁸ Granville-Barker 1935, 42. He dedicates a subsection to the Nurse before any of the other "Characters", including Mercutio.

⁹ Rowell 1986, 89. For a photograph of Mrs. Stirling as the Nurse, when she reprised the role in the 1885 production, with Mary Anderson as Juliet, see "Mary Anne ('Fanny') Stirling . . . as the Nurse", *National Portrait Gallery Image Collection* 2014, NPGx38810.

The Nurse of Mrs. Stirling admits of nothing but praise; it simply could not be better. Her garrulity, her fondness for her child and her dinner, her endeavours to enter into Juliet's desires and her total failure to comprehend the point of view, her indifference to Romeo, as Romeo, her petulance, her dignity and her innocent little triumphs, are all there, and all overlaid with a film of good-nature, that makes the personification irresistible. One cannot help saying, "What a dear old woman!" and quite understanding why Juliet was so fond of her. (An. 1882, 326)

Ellen Terry herself praised Stirling as "the only Nurse that I have seen who did not play the part like a female pantaloons" (Terry 1908, 250). Another member of the 1882 company, the young Frank Benson, in his first professional role (Paris), recalled his own "old nurse, after seeing the play, trotting round to all her acquaintances asking everyone 'Did you see me on the stage at the Lyceum? Oh, I did laugh when I saw myself there with Miss Ellen Terry and Mr. Irving all so fine'" (Allen 1922, 8).

In 1935 at the New Theatre, in what is widely recognized as the first truly modern production of the play, John Gielgud and Laurence Olivier alternated the roles of Romeo and Mercutio, but there was "general agreement . . . that the Nurse of Edith Evans alone provides a sufficient reason for going to a theatre" (Cookman 1935, x2).

An earthy characterization, full of innuendo humour, a portrait of a coarse old confidant, it surprised many people. In lesser hands the Nurse can be a thundering old bore, prating on and on, but Edith's great achievement was that she found hidden meanings which disguised some of the more tedious aspects of the character. There was a quality of stillness about Edith's major performances that few, if any, equaled. She *used* silence, she listened, and this to my mind is one of the hallmarks of greatness in an actor. A great actor has an ear for the pause and can calculate its bearable duration with the exactness of a scientist . . . dropping the laugh line into the silence like a stone falling to the bottom of a well. (Forbes 1977, 149)

She was "the most real old woman you ever saw, earthy as a potato, slow as a carthorse, cunning as a badger" (Darlington 1935). She looked like a peasant woman from a Dutch painting, with her white head scarf and voluminous skirts (An. 1935). Other reviewers compared her Nurse to "the detailed solidity of a Durer drawing" or a portrait "that Vermeer would not have been ashamed to sign".¹⁰ "Whenever she was on the stage, reprimanding, soothing, or merely getting her breath, the lovers both seemed children, and it needed her magnificently vital presence to give their story depth." (Stonier, 1935).

¹⁰ For these and other accounts of her reprise of the role in 1961, see Jackson 2003, 63-4.

She had “the exact mixture of wheedling and impudence for Juliet’s nurse” (Shipley 1935, 24). Her Nurse “was satisfyingly complete—tetchy, worldly, gossipy, splendidly ancient” (Hall 1961, 253). Like Mrs. Stirling, Edith Evans was so successful in the role that she performed it in more than one production.

As these critics and performances attest, Juliet’s Nurse is a fully developed and emotionally complicated character—unlike any other member of this occupation in Shakespeare’s plays, or in any surviving plays written in English before the closing of the theaters in 1642.¹¹ For instance, the Nurse in George Peele’s *Edward I*, like the Nurse in *3 Henry VI*, never speaks. The Nurse in *Supposes* (George Gascoigne’s 1566 translation of Ludovico Ariosto’s 1509 comedy *I Suppositi*) does speak, but only in the play’s short first scene, where she helps supply necessary exposition. Not surprisingly, when Shakespeare adapted *Supposes* to create *The Taming of the Shrew*, Ariosto’s Nurse disappeared, along with her clumsy opening scene.

Why is the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* so profoundly different from all her dramatic contemporaries? And so different from Stoppard’s two Nurses, too? Or from the truncated clown-nurse in Baz Luhrman’s *Romeo + Juliet*?

2. Sixteenth-Century Nurses

In most early modern plays, the nurse conventionally functions as a living accompaniment of a newborn child (as in Shakespeare’s collaborative *Titus Andronicus*, *3 Henry VI*, and *Pericles*) or as a reliable witness to a past birth. An example of that second function is provided by the first Nurse in an extant native English play. The anonymous *Historie of Iacob and Esau* was printed in 1557, and perhaps performed as early as 1553; “Deborra the Nurse” is listed on the title page as one of the play’s ten characters (Wiggins 2012, #251). The wicked brother Esau insults the Nurse as an “old heg” (hag) and “witche”. Nevertheless, he commands her to tell him the “truth” about his birth and that of his virtuous fraternal twin Jacob:

ESAU. Is it true that when I and my brother were first borne,
 And I by Gods ordinaunce came forth him before,
 Iacob came forthwith, holding me fast by the heele?
 DEBORRA. It is true, I was there, and saw it very wele.¹²

This information about the twins’ birth comes from Genesis 25:26 (“And afterward came his brother out, and his hand held Esau by the heel”). But the

¹¹ For a complete list see Berger, Bradford, and Sondergard 1998, 73.

¹² White 1992, 124-5. Only a fragment of the first edition survives; I quote the first extant title page (1567).

Bible does not mention a nurse, let alone name her and give her a role in the story of the adult brothers. The playwright invented Deborra the Nurse as well as her exchange with Esau.

Wet-nurses in the pre-modern world were often present during the delivery of a child, because of the high rate of maternal mortality. If the mother died in childbirth, the child would only survive if another woman was on hand to nurse it. And even if the mother lived, it would have been wise to have a lactating woman available. The mother's milk might not let down properly, or a common infection such as mastitis could set in, or (like Shakespeare's wife Anne) a woman might give birth to twins, and suddenly need help to provide enough nourishment for two infants. Moreover, many upper-class women - especially if, like Lady Capulet, they were Roman Catholics - preferred to delegate the messy physical labor of nursing to a paid servant. The normal practice of nursing on demand also reduced fertility, and a key function of aristocratic women was to have multiple pregnancies in the hope of producing multiple heirs, thus increasing the chances that at least one would survive to adulthood, despite high infant mortality rates (Fildes 1986, 152-212). Thus, in the millennia before modern maternity hospitals and mass-produced commercial baby formula, an upper-class woman giving birth was often attended by a wet-nurse as well as a midwife (as is Tamora in *Titus Andronicus*). Both could - like Deborra in *Jacob and Esau* - serve as secondary legal witnesses of the event. (Which is why both are murdered in *Titus*).

Lyly's *Mother Bombie* (published in 1594 and performed by the Children of Paul's no later than 1590) contains another example of the Nurse as witness. That play's comic confusions are resolved by Vicinia, a wet-nurse, who does not appear until the play's last two scenes. Unlike Deborra, Vicinia's employment by the parents ended when she weaned their children. In the final minutes of the play, she needs to remind Memphio that she had nursed his now-adult son and to remind Stellio that she had nursed his now-adult daughter. She then confesses:

I had, at that time, two children of mine own, and, being poor, thought it better to change them than kill them. I imagined if, by device, I could thrust my children into your houses, they should be well enough brought up in their youth, and wisely provided for in their age. Nature wrought with me, and when they were weaned I sent home mine instead of yours, which hitherto you have kept tenderly, as yours. (Lyly 2010, 5.3.303-10)

Shakespeare was influenced by Lyly's comedies and might have read *Mother Bombie* before he wrote *Romeo and Juliet*. But Lyly was here drawing upon the conventions of Roman comedy, and particularly of the plays of Terence, popular in humanist grammar schools.

Vicinia took the children she was wet-nursing to her own home, then returned them to their parents after they were weaned. That was a common, indeed normal, practice. But Deborra represents the alternative model, where, long after weaning a child, the nurse remained as a household servant, providing living continuity between the newborn and the young adult. This may seem implausible or unnatural to us, but “from wet-nursing through apprenticeship” sixteenth-century culture “widely employed surrogacy as the institutional model for parenting” (Paster 1993, 219). Elizabeth I quoted Saint Gregory: “We are more bound to them that bringeth us up well than to our parents, for our parents do that which is natural for them—that is, bring us into this world—but our bringers-up are a cause to make us live well in it.” This was certainly true in Elizabeth’s case: “the members of her household, not of her family, were . . . the principal influences upon her as a child and young woman” (Starkey 2001, 16). In fact, wet-nurses were often women who were already servants in the mother’s household; in early modern England the words “family” and “household” were used interchangeably, and servants, especially wet-nurses, “were also quite literally part of the family” (Campbell 1989, 363). The first spoken line of *Romeo and Juliet* promises us the story, not of two families, but of “Two households, both alike in dignity”.

Another dramatic representation of the importance of a nurse, rather than a biological family, is *The Comedy of Patient and Meek Grissil* (printed in 1569, and probably first performed in 1561).¹³ Grissil’s husband, testing his wife’s patience and obedience, declares that, for political reasons, he must have their new-born daughter executed. Grissil laments this decision, but decides that “This chance with patience I will sustain and bear”, then tells her husband, “My lord, the daughter is your own, with her attempt your will, / If it seem pleasant to thy heart, thy pleasure now fulfill”.¹⁴ But the Nurse intervenes, directly confronting the husband in an eleven-line speech beginning “Alas, my lord, be merciful, commit not such offence” (1097). When he dismisses her objections, she continues to argue with him in two more long speeches (1122-31, 1150-61), finally offering to take the child herself: “For I will feed and nourish her, and take her as mine own. / These breasts shall bring her up, these hands shall find her food” (1153-4). She is willing to be “clean exiled” herself, “for safeguard of thy child” (1160-1). The husband-father remains adamant, and one of his henchmen leaves with the infant, threatening to murder her; but the Nurse follows him offstage, promising, in

¹³ Wiggins 2012, #350. Wiggins argues that, because the play specifies that Grissil suckled her daughter herself, this servant is presumably “a dry-nurse”. But she may have been a supplementary wet-nurse: she offers to take the newborn and feed it with her own breasts.

¹⁴ Gildenhuis 1996, 1090-3. I cite line numbers rather than pages.

what may be an aside before her exit, "Perhaps my mournful petition / May cause him leave his sinful intention" (1172-3). During this long intervention, as the Nurse pleads for the child, the child's mother, Grissil, remains meekly and patiently silent on stage. Five scenes later, after Grissil has given birth to a second (male) child, the Nurse reappears, "*bearing the child in her arms*" (Sc. 13). Alone on stage, she cherishes the infant, noting "how prettily" it "can smile"; she joys "To dandle this sweet soul", promises "To rise early and sleep late . . . To cherish and love it", sings a long lullaby, and then promises to "lull" the "Sweet babe" and "rock" him "asleep" (1352-90). When the murderous henchman returns, threatening to murder this "brat" too, she fights to keep the child from him, but is physically overpowered; again, she pleads for the child's life, but he is not persuaded, and takes it away "to murder it in haste" (1427). Left alone on stage, the Nurse curses the "cruel father" in a long speech, and then decides to return to "poor Grissil" to comfort her and to "cry out" against the apparently infanticidal marquiss (1528-51).

What is remarkable about this theatrical incarnation of the Patient Griselda myth is that its Nurse is dramatically and conspicuously more maternal, in her care for someone else's children, in her willingness to sacrifice herself for them, than is their biological mother. Grissil's duty to acquiesce in patriarchal authority takes priority over a "natural" commitment to her children. We may regard this as a ludicrously extreme fiction, but in fact abused women still do sometimes sacrifice their children to the whims of a violent husband or boyfriend.

We have no evidence that Shakespeare had read or seen performed *Jacob and Esau*, or *Patient and Meek Grissil*, or *Mother Bombie*. Nevertheless, these plays illuminate a set of sixteenth-century cultural practices and assumptions that informed his portrayal of the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*. For instance, it might not have astonished early audiences or readers that the Nurse's bond with Juliet is stronger than her mother's. In all the extant early texts of Shakespeare's play, stage directions and speech-prefixes consistently identify Angelica with the generic noun "Nurse". By contrast, Juliet's birth mother is never given a personal name, and is identified in stage directions and speech prefixes with four different labels: "Wife" (most often), "Lady", "Old Lady", and "Mother". Of these, only "Mother" connects her to Juliet; "Wife" links her to her husband Capulet, "Lady" emphasizes her social status, "Old" prioritizes her age. This confusion of generic labels does not make her a more complex character, or a "bad mother" either. But the shifting labels do indicate that her relationship with Juliet is not primary or central to her identity. By contrast, "Nurse" monopolizes Angelica's identity.

When Capulet's Wife announces her husband's decision to marry Juliet to Paris "on Thursday morn", Juliet immediately and forcefully rejects the idea, asking her mother "to tell my lord and father" that "I will not marry

yet". Her mother replies, "Tell him so yourself". This might be played as brusque, sarcastic, or fearful, but it is certainly *not* supportive of Juliet. When Capulet, entering, asks his wife "Have you delivered to her our decree?", she replies, "she will none"—and then adds "I would the fool were married to her grave".¹⁵ Capulet, enraged, then threatens to "drag" his daughter "on a hurdle" to the church (in the way condemned traitors were dragged through the streets to their execution). After this outburst, his wife does say "Fie, fie, what, are you mad?" (17.157). But that does not stop Capulet; his next speech tells Juliet to marry Paris on Thursday "Or never after look me in the face" and says that his "fingers itch" (presumably to strike her). The Nurse then intervenes much more forcefully than Juliet's mother has done:

NURSE God in heaven bless her!
 You are to blame, my lord, to rate her so.
 CAPULET And why, my Lady Wisdom! Hold your tongue,
 Good Prudence. Smatter with your gossips, go!
 NURSE I speak no treason.
 CAPULET O God-i-good-e'en!
 NURSE May not one speak?
 CAPULET Peace, you mumbling fool.
 Utter your gravity o'er a gossip's bowl,
 For here we need it not.
 CAPULET'S WIFE You are too hot.
 (17.168-75)

The Nurse does not sound like a clown here. She is far more courageous and persistent than the Wife: she interrupts her abusive boss three times in a row, and explicitly blames him for berating his daughter. In the middle of the nineteenth century, Mrs. Glover stood up to Capulet with "a sullen, half-checked fierceness. . . like the growl of an angry but wary dog when one attacks his mistress. Her attachment to Juliet was indeed a sort of animal instinct" (Marston 1888, 1.264). In Franco Zeffirelli's 1968 film, the physically substantial Nurse (Pat Heywood) repeatedly inserts herself between a violent Capulet and his small teenage daughter, risking a beating herself to protect Juliet from one. By contrast, Juliet's mother here manages only four syllables. Capulet responds with his most violent speech (176-95), concluding that Juliet can "hang, beg, starve, die in the streets" if she disobeys him. He then exits, and Juliet turns to her mother: "O my sweet mother, cast me not away" - to which Capulet's Wife replies "Talk not to me, for I'll not speak a word. / Do as thou wilt, for I have done with thee" (17.196-203). In performance, these twenty monosyllables are usually spoken "with shocking cold-

¹⁵ Shakespeare 2016, Sc. 17 (traditionally 3.5), lines 112-25.

ness”; at best, they can be given “hurriedly and distractedly as she is leaving to calm down her enraged husband” (Loehlin 2002, 202). However they are spoken, Juliet’s mother exits, pursuing a bear. Conspicuously, the Nurse does *not* exit; she remains with Juliet. Conspicuously, the Nurse does *not* command Juliet to be silent. The structure of the scene makes it clear that the Nurse is Juliet’s only remaining ally in the Capulet household. When Juliet begs the Nurse for “comfort” and “counsel”, the Nurse *does* “speak a word”. Her long reply (212-25) advises Juliet to marry Paris. That advice is rejected by Juliet and condemned by most critics as a betrayal. But no one should miss the difference in length, and tone, between the Wife’s speech and the Nurse’s speech. Fran Bennett, who played the Nurse in a 1993 production by the Los Angeles Women’s Shakespeare Company, explained that she was trying “to get [Juliet] to live in the real world” (Taylor 2005, 122). The Nurse is a servant, a subordinate: like most common women, she has had a lifetime of experience not getting her own way, having to adjust to circumstances beyond her control. And while both Juliet’s parents would rather see their daughter die than disobey them, the Nurse attempts to save Juliet’s life. Juliet’s rejection of the Nurse is, in fact, a rejection of life: her last words in the scene are “myself have power to die” (242). In her next scene, with the Friar, she grabs a knife and threatens to commit suicide then and there. She is dissuaded only when the Friar proposes an alternative solution. Before she takes the Friar’s potion, Juliet wonders whether it might kill her—but takes it anyway. When the Friar’s plan fails, in the play’s last scene, Juliet does commit suicide. The Nurse offers her life; she chooses death.

Shakespeare’s primary source for *Romeo and Juliet* does not even include the Nurse in this pivotal confrontation between Juliet, her mother, and her father. In Arthur Brooke’s *The Tragicall Historye of Romeus and Juliet* the Nurse does not speak to Juliet until three hundred lines after that family quarrel: after Juliet’s visit to the Friar and after Juliet returns home, apologizes to her parents, and agrees to marry Paris. “But Juliet, the whilst, her thoughts within her brest did locke”; because she has already lied to her mother, she does not think it a sin to also “bleare her nurces eye” (2288-92).¹⁶ Only then, after Juliet has apparently decided to obey her parents, does the poem give its “Nurce” a speech praising Paris. Thus, Brooke does not contrast a solicitous Nurse with a cold mother, as Shakespeare does. Brooke’s Juliet has already distanced herself from the Nurce before the Nurce comments on the arranged marriage to Paris. And Brooke’s Nurce provides a very different defense of the second marriage.

¹⁶ All references to *Romeus and Juliet* cite the text and line-numbering of the 1562 edition in Brooke 1957.

ROMEO Then, since the case so stands as now it doth,
I think it best you married with the County.
(Shakespeare 2016, 17.216-17)

ROMEUS The pleasures past before, she must account as gayne,
But if he doe retorne, what then? For one she shall have twayne.
The one shall use her as his lawfull wedded wife,
In wanton love, with equal joy the other leade his lyfe.
And best shall she be sped of any townish dame,
Of husband and of paramour, to fynde her change of game.
These words and like, the nurce did speake, in hope to please,
But greatly did these wicked words the ladies mynde disease.
(Brooke 1957, 2303-10)

Shakespeare's Juliet rejects the Nurse's advice because it would involve breaking her marital vow; throughout his career, Shakespeare emphasized the sanctity of oaths and other "binding language" (Kerrigan 2016). In the play, Juliet has consummated her marriage, physically, but has done so only once. In contrast, in the poem Juliet's sexual relationship with Romeus has already lasted for months. With the salacious language of "use," "sped", and "game", Brooke's Nurce celebrates the proposed second marriage as pure sexual opportunity: at the worst, the "pleasures" of a premarital fling with Romeo followed by public marriage to Paris, but at best a permanent bigamy that offers Juliet a variety of "game", juggling "wanton love" with both husband and lover.

Shakespeare's transformation of his source in the episode where Juliet rebels against her father's determination to marry her immediately to Paris - strengthening the Nurse's emotional commitment to Juliet while weakening the relationship between mother and daughter - can also be seen earlier in that scene. In Brooke, after Tybalt's death, "The carefull mother marks" her daughter's continued sighing, weeping, sleeplessness, and lack of interest in her food and clothes; then "of her health afrayde", she speaks to Juliet, assuring her that she and her "loving father . . . love you more / Then our owne propre breth and life" (Brooke 1957, 1785-92). Juliet's answer confuses her: "The wofull mother knew not, what her daughter ment, / And loth to vex her childe by words" she leaves her in peace (1807-8). But as Juliet's condition continues to worsen, "without all measures, is" the mother's "hart tormented sore", and finally "She thought it good to tell the syre, how yll his childe did fare" (1813-15). She informs him, "If you marke our daughter well" (as she has done) he will see "That much in daunger standes her lyfe, except somme helpe we fynd" (1818, 1829):

ROMEUS For though with busy care, I have employed my wit,
And used all the ways I knew, to learne the truth of it,

Neither extremitie, ne gentle means could boote;
 She hydeth close within her brest, her secret sorrows roote.

(Brooke 1957, 1831-5)

Brooke describes a mother who knows her daughter well, notices that something is wrong, assures her of her parents' love, realizes that she is keeping a secret, and finally, in desperation, alerts her husband to the seriousness of the problem and the need for intervention. Brooke describes the actions of a mother whose attention to her daughter's welfare could hardly be bettered, then or now. But, like many mothers of teenagers, she mistakes the cause of her daughter's self-destructive behavior.

ROMEUS

And I doe beleve

The onely crop and roote of all my daughters payne,
 Is grudgeing envies faynt disease: perhaps she doth disdayne
 To see in wedlocke yoke the most part of her feeres,
 Whilst onely she unmarried, doth lose so many yerres.

(Brooke 1957, 1842-6)

She urges her husband, "take on your daughter ruth" and "Joyne her at once" in marriage to an appropriate suitor (1852-3). The mother's diagnosis is, readers know, disastrously mistaken, but it arises from her close attention to and real concern for her daughter. In Shakespeare's play, by contrast, it is the father who comes up with this solution (Sc.16, 3.4). Afterwards, following her husband's instructions, Capulet's Wife goes to tell her daughter the news. First, she unknowingly interrupts the last tender exchanges between Romeo and Juliet. Then she proceeds to berate her daughter for her weeping, apparently for Tybalt: "Some grief shows much of love, / But much of grief shows still some want of wit" (17.71-2). She curses and insults Romeo at length, promising to arrange for him to be murdered in Mantua. After this demonstration of the colossal emotional gap between mother and daughter, she announces "But now I'll tell thee joyful tidings, girl" (17.104). The tidings are, of course, anything but joyful to Juliet.

So far, I have been consistently quoting the canonical text of *Romeo and Juliet*, based on the 1599 quarto edition (Q2), which advertises itself on the title page as "Newly corrected, augmented, and amended". I have done so because that text has been the foundation of the play's modern editorial and theatrical history. But there are in fact two substantially different sixteenth-century texts of *Romeo and Juliet*. Steven Urkowitz has argued that in the 1597 quarto (Q1) Juliet, Lady Capulet, and the Nurse "generally support each other", but the 1599 text (Q2) "shows them instead as psychologically, emotionally, and even linguistically divided" (Urkowitz 2017, 185). In particular, he demonstrates that, in this scene (Sc.17; 3.5), "Q1 offers a pattern of

audience as someone who inhabits a social space between mother and nurse. The mother should want to be alone to “talk in secret” with her daughter about a profoundly intimate and life-changing matter, so she dismisses the Nurse. But almost immediately she realizes that she cannot comfortably play her maternal role without the ancillary intermediation of the nurse. When she addresses to the nurse a reference to Juliet’s age the mother allows, and indeed invokes, an issue where the nurse’s authority equals or exceeds her own.

Romeo and Juliet’s Nurse is performing a classical dramatic function when she recalls the circumstances of Juliet’s birth. “Faith, I can tell her age unto an hour” (4.12). Her precision establishes that she was physically present at the birth and remembers it well. But Shakespeare’s Nurse differs fundamentally from Vicinia, Deborra, and all their classical theatrical predecessors and early modern descendants. Juliet’s birth is never mentioned in the 3020 lines of *The Tragical Historye of Romeus and Juliet*. Her natal legitimacy is not an issue in the poem or the play. Instead, Juliet’s Nurse provides “the most detailed child’s biography of any character in Shakespeare” (Weis 2015, 296). But in fact her account of the birth is all about *her*: her *own* memory, her *own* life. What matters, in Shakespeare’s invented scene, is a revelation of the biography and personality of *the witness*, rather than the events being witnessed. This happens in what Barbara Everett calls “Shakespeare’s first greatly human verse speech”, which takes “Brooke’s sketch of a conventional character-type” and gives it “a dense human solidity” (130, 131).

Come Lammas Eve at night shall she be fourteen.
 Susan and she—God rest all Christian souls!—
 Were of an age. Well, Susan is with God,
 She was too good for me. But, as I said,
 On Lammas Eve at night shall she be fourteen,
 That shall she, marry, I remember it well.
 (4.18-23)

The Nurse’s dead child “Susan” is not in Shakespeare’s sources, and not necessary to the play’s plot. Lührman’s *Romeo + Juliet* omits all the Nurse’s reminiscences about her past. Indeed, the Nurse could be completely removed from this scene without affecting the tragedy’s narrative logic. Unlike the reminiscences of Deborra and Vicinia, this Nurse’s memories may not seem logically or narratively necessary. Stanley Wells has brilliantly analyzed this speech as an exemplar of “the uses of inconsequentiality” (Wells 1980). But Shakespeare’s audiences would have immediately understood the lived logic of the story this Nurse tells. She was able to nurse Juliet because she had just given birth herself, and her breasts were therefore producing milk - but her

own newborn had just died, presumably earlier that day.¹⁹ That explains her repeated emphasis on “*the hour*” of Juliet’s birth on “*Lammas Eve at night*” (my italics). She remembers the date (when both girls were born) but also the time (which separated the birth and death of Susan from the birth, shortly later, of Juliet, who is still alive).

For the Nurse, Juliet was, and has continued to be, a literal, physical, emotional replacement for Susan. I have characterized the Nurse as Juliet’s “substitute mother,” but Juliet is also the Nurse’s “substitute daughter.” The intense relationship between a newborn and its primary adult creates a mutual biological imprinting, recognized in early modern Europe as “ordained by God” (Scott 2018, 79). The Nurse’s first scene establishes that she bonded on Juliet as strongly as she would have on her own child Susan, if Susan had lived. In fact, because in a case like this the bond with the new child is connected, verbally and temporally, to the grief for a lost one, the connection to Juliet may well have been *more* powerful, for the Nurse, than the traditional mother-child bond. The rest of her speech provides further evidence for this conclusion:

’Tis since the earthquake now eleven years,
 And she was weaned – I never shall forget it –
 Of all the days of the year upon that day,
 For then I had laid wormwood to my dug,
 Sitting in the sun under the dovehouse wall.
 My lord and you were then at Mantua.
 (4.24-9)

It was the Nurse who raised Juliet, not her biological mother. Lord Capulet and his Lady were away – specifically in Mantua – on the day of the earthquake and the weaning. Theoretically, Juliet’s mother may have been present, physically and emotionally, every other day of Juliet’s childhood, but this is the only day we hear about, and the dramatic law of synecdoche means that we immediately take this day as typical.

When it did taste the wormwood on the nipple
 Of my dug and felt it bitter, pretty fool,
 To see it tetchy and fall out wi’th’ dug!
 . . .
 And since that time it is eleven years,
 For then she could stand high-lone.
 (4.31-3, 36-7)

¹⁹ Theoretically, the Nurse could have nursed both infants, and Susan could have died years later. But Susan is nowhere in the picture when Juliet was weaned, and the Nurse’s association of the two births is immediately followed by her memory of the death of Susan, a juxtaposition that encourages audiences to link them, too.

The Nurse was thus present for two key moments in Juliet's childhood: her birth and her weaning. She breast-fed Juliet for three years, an unusually long time, then as now (Fildes 1986, 352-6). Later in the scene, we learn that she was Juliet's "only nurse" (4.68), meaning that she monopolized that bond for the child's first three years. But she was also responsible for a crucial, and difficult, moment of individuation: the withdrawal of the breast, to the dismay of the child. This anticipates the moment, later in the play, when she tells Juliet that "I think it best you marry with the County" (17.217). In both cases, the most important adult in the child's world takes away something that the child wants, but cannot have. In both cases, the child responds negatively to being told "no".

The anecdote about Juliet's weaning continues, introducing the Nurse's husband:

Nay, by th'rood,
 She could have run and waddled all about,
 For even the day before she broke her brow,
 And then my husband — God be with his soul,
 A was a merry man! — took up the child.
 'Yea,' quoth he, 'dost thou fall upon thy face?
 Thou wilt fall backward when thou hast more wit,
 Wilt thou not, Jule?' And, by my halidom,
 The pretty wretch left crying and said 'Ay'.
 (4.37-45)

Again, the Nurse associates Juliet with an important person in her own life, who has since died. Juliet is apparently all that is left of the Nurse's family: the girl is a substitute for her dead husband as well as her dead child. For Juliet, the Nurse's husband was a substitute father: he, rather than Capulet, played with Juliet as a child, comforted her physically and verbally, and had a nickname for her (used by no one else in the play). We hear about Juliet's prehistory with the Nurse's husband long before we see Juliet interact with her biological father: she and Capulet do not speak to each other until that much later scene when he violently threatens her if she disobeys him.

The Nurse's repetitive reminiscences in this scene end with her telling Juliet, "If I might live to see thee married once, / I have my wish" (4.62-3). This prompts Juliet's mother to raise the subject of marriage to Paris, a prospect that delights the Nurse. And Shakespeare gives the Nurse the last words in the scene (present in Q2 but not Q1): "Go, girl, seek happy nights to happy days" (4.105). What Shakespeare's Nurse desires, in her first scene, is the happiness of her surrogate daughter, and that objective governs her actions throughout the play. Again, Shakespeare's portrait differs fundamentally from Brooke's. In the poem, Juliet uses "promest hyre" (the promise of

payment) to persuade her Nurce to keep secret her relationship with Romeo and to provide “her ayde” in communicating with him (623-30). That short transitional episode is immediately followed by the Nurce’s conversation with Romeo, arranging the wedding; their dialogue ends when Romeo gives the Nurce “vi. Crownes of gold”:

ROMEUS In seven yeres twise tolde she had not bowd so lowe,
Her crooked knees, as now they bowe, she sweares she will bestowe
Her crafty wit, her time, and all her busy payne,
To helpe him to his hoped blisse . . .

(Brooke 1957, 669-72)

She immediately returns to Juliet and gives her a complete account of her conversation with Romeo, omitting only one thing: “she forgot the taking of the golde” (692). She then encourages Juliet to marry Romeo as quickly as possible:

ROMEUS She that this morning could her mistres mynde diswade,
Is now become an Oratresse, her lady to perswade.
If any man be here, whom love hath clad with care,
To him I speake, if thou wilt spede, thy purse thou must not spare
. . .
For glittering gold is woont by kind to move the hart,
And often times a slight rewarde doth cause a more desart.
Ywritten have I red, I wot not in what booke,
There is no better way to fishe, then with a golden hooke.

(Brooke 1957, 703-6, 709-12)

Romeo has not given any money to Juliet, so the narrator is here commenting on the Nurce: she is being paid by both Romeo and Juliet, and she does not tell either of the rewards she is receiving from the other. There can be no doubt, in Brooke, of the Nurce’s mercenary motives. Shakespeare, by contrast, does not have Juliet bribe her Nurse, and her interaction with Romeo is much more ambiguous:

ROMEUS Here is for thy pains.

NURSE No, truly, sir, not a penny.

ROMEUS Go to, I say you shall.

NURSE This afternoon, sir. Well, she shall be there.

(Shakespeare 2016, 10.146-9)

In performance, Shakespeare’s Nurse almost always takes the money (comically), but none of the early texts explicitly directs her to do so. In any case, Shakespeare has the Nurse initially refuse, and he does not indicate the very large sum that Brooke specifies or indicate that Juliet has also promised her

a reward or attribute her change of heart to financial incentives.

But if Shakespeare's Nurse is not mercenary, another servant in the Capulet household is: Peter. In fact, when the Nurse refuses Romeo's money, it would be entirely in character for the clown-servant Peter to silently put out his own hand to take it.

3. Seventeenth-Century Nurses and Clowns

The first actor known to have played the role of Shakespeare's Nurse was James Nokes in the 1680 adaptation by Thomas Otway, *The History and Fall of Caius Marius*. (Otway's version continued to be revived until the 1760s). Otway shifted the play from Renaissance Verona to ancient Rome, with the quarrel between Montagues and Capulets translated into an episode of the civil wars between Marius and Sulla. The only two characters not given Roman names and identities are the Apothecary and the Nurse.

The Nurse's first appearance resembles her first scene in *Romeo and Juliet* (Sc. 4; traditionally 1.3), except that Juliet's father replaces her mother. Otway eliminated the mother completely, but he and his audiences could not dispense with the nurse. However, Otway's Nurse is not Shakespeare's, as demonstrated by the first mention of marriage in the two plays:

CAPULET'S WIFE How stands your dispositions to be married?
 JULIET It is an honour that I dream not of.
 NURSE An honour! Were not I thine only nurse
 I would say thou hadst sucked wisdom from thy teat.
 (Shakespeare 2016, 4.66-9)

METELLUS What think you then of marriage, my Lavinia?
 It was the subject that I came to treat of.
 LAVINIA It is a thing I have not dreamt of yet.
 NURSE Thing! The thing of Marriage? Were I not thy Nurse, I would swear
 thou hadst sucked thy Wisdom from thy Teat. The thing?
 (Otway 1680, C3)

Shakespeare's Nurse praises Juliet for recognizing that marriage is an honorable aspiration. Otway's Nurse, with her unsubtle repetition of the sexual slang "thing", instead belongs to Restoration comedy. This transformation fits with the casting of Nokes in the role. Professional actresses had taken over female roles since the early 1660s, and in *Caius Martius* Lavinia/Juliet was written for and performed by Elizabeth Barry, "the greatest actress of the Restoration" (Jones 2004). Opposite to the young, sensual, tragic Mrs. Barry, Nokes as the Nurse anticipates the Jim Carter/Ralph Bashford "Nurse" of *Shakespeare in Love*: a comic drag impersonation/parody of a woman by

a male clown. Nokes was London's leading comic actor from 1664 till his retirement in 1692, and by 1679 his name had become a noun: "a Nokes" was slang for "a fool" (*OED* nokes *n.*). Nokes had already played a comic Nurse seven years earlier, in Henry Nevil Payne's *The Fatal Jealousy* (1672). These transvestite roles were so successful that he acquired the nickname "Nurse Nokes" (Chernaik 2004).

Otway's revision of the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* was clearly "Adapted . . . purposely for the Mouth of Mr. Nokes".²⁰ Colley Cibber wrote that Nokes "scarce ever made his first Entrance in a Play, but he was received with an involuntary Applause" and "a General Laughter, which the very sight of him provok'd" (Otway highlighted that first entrance by placing it at the start of Act 2). Cibber alerts us to the fact that the published text of a role played by Nokes underestimates the comedy of his performance, because "the ridiculous Solemnity of his Features were enough to have set a whole Bench of Bishops into a Titter". In particular, "what a copious, and distressful Harangue have I seen him make, with his Looks (while the House has been in one continued Roar, for several Minutes) before he could prevail with his Courage to speak a Word" (Cibber 1968, 83-4). It is easy to apply this account to Nokes's discovery that Lavinia/Juliet is, apparently, dead. Not surprisingly, Otway's adaptation eliminates the Nurse's most tragic moment in Shakespeare's play.

After her discovery that Juliet is, apparently, dead, she cries for help, and Juliet's mother enters—but the Nurse cannot bring herself to say the words.

CAPULET'S WIFE What noise is here?

NURSE O, lamentable day!

CAPULET'S WIFE What is the matter?

NURSE Look, look! O heavy day!

(21.45-6)

Otway's Nurse has no such difficulty communicating the news: "Your onely Daughter's dead: /As dead as a Herring, Stock-fish, or Door-nail" (Otway 1680, H4v-I1). And this is followed, three speeches later, by Nurse Nokes's final words in *Caius Marius*, alone on stage after the exit of the bereaved father:

It shall be done and done and overdone, as we are undone. And I will sigh, and cry till I am swell'd as big as a Pumkin. Nay, my poor Baby, I'll take care thou shalt not dy for nothing: for I will wash thee with my Tears, perfume thee with my Sighs, and stick a Flower in every part about thee. (Otway 1680, I1)

²⁰ Downes 1987, 62 (referring to the adaptation for Nokes of the title role in *Sir Martin Mar-All*).

The words themselves are ridiculous, and after all the other sexual innuendos in the role it is difficult *not* to put an obscene interpretation on the final phrase. Although we do not know exactly how Nokes performed this scene, Cibber gives us a clue, noting that

In the ludicrous Distresses, which by the Laws of Comedy, Folly is often involv'd in; [Nokes] sunk into such a mixture of piteous Pusillanimity, and a Consternation so rufully ridiculous and inconsolable, that when he had shook you, to a Fatigue of Laughter, it became a moot point, whether you ought not to have pity'd him. (Cibber 1968, 84)

Contrast Otway's text and Nokes's style with Mrs. Stirling's performance of Shakespeare's scene: "Her parrot scream when she found [Juliet] dead was horribly real and effective" (Terry 1908, 230). Edith Evans's "clumsy totter for help after finding Juliet's body" with "its accompanying jangle of speech" still "haunt[ed] the memory" of a spectator, almost thirty years later (Trewin 1964, 153). In 1919, Ellen Terry followed "a frantic shaking of the girl as she attempts to rouse her" with "a lifting of the eyelids and a great agonized cry" (Denham 1958, 90).

Some modern critics might dismiss the interpretations of this moment by Stirling (1882), Terry (1919) and Evans (1935) as sentimental. How can we know that the clowning of Nokes is less authentic than the tragic interpretations of this moment by veteran nineteenth and twentieth century actresses? Although the audience knows that Juliet is not actually dead, her parents, the Nurse, and Paris do not. Their shock and grief are real. The Nurse's reaction is given primacy, and in Adrian Noble's 1995 Royal Shakespeare Company production, the Nurse, before the others come onstage, finds and then conceals the "vial" containing the drug that Juliet had used to render herself unconscious (Loehlin 2002, 223). For the Nurse (played by Susan Brown), the vial was evidence that Juliet committed suicide — a damnable sin that would have prevented her from receiving a Christian burial, and would have made her death even more unbearable for her parents. In Noble's production, the Nurse kept this pain to herself. In all productions, neither Juliet nor the Friar gives a thought to the brutal emotional impact of their deception. And the audience knows - because the Prologue has told them - that Juliet and Romeo will die by the end of the play: both do, in fact, commit suicide. So the reactions here anticipate what we know is coming for these characters, soon enough. Indeed, it makes the play's ending even more heartbreaking, because they have to go through this trauma *twice*. For anyone who has experienced the unexpected death of a beloved child, there is nothing funny about the Nurse's response.

O woe! O woeful, woeful, woeful day!

Most lamentable day! Most woeful day
 That ever, ever, I did yet behold!
 O day, O day, O day, O hateful day.
 Never was seen so black a day as this!
 O woeful day, O woeful day!
 (21.77-82)

In Rondi Reed's "brilliant performance" as the Nurse at the Chicago Shakespeare Theater in 2005, this "woeful day" speech stood out in "her achingly realistic grief" (Bourus 2005, 118). In one way, the speech recalls the repetitive style of the Nurse's first scene. There is no beautiful poetry here, no complexity of thought or feeling: just painful, obsessive, uncomprehending repetition. She tells us that Juliet's death is more unbearable than the death of her husband or her newborn infant Susan. She is stuck on the word "day", in a way that anticipates the philosopher Denise Riley's description of grief as "living in suddenly arrested time: that acute sensation of being cut off from any temporal flow that can grip you after the sudden death of your child" (Riley 2019, 13).

We do not know who played the Nurse in the 1590s, but we do know it was not the company's equivalent of Nokes. The only performer identified in early documents is Will Kemp. Kemp played Peter, a character who appears on stage with the Nurse in at least one scene (Sc. 10; 2.3), enters as she exits in another scene (Sc. 21; 4.4), and probably is the comical Capulet "Servant" who appears alongside her in Sc.4 (1.3) and Sc. 19 (4.2). As with other Kemp roles, Peter is a comic servant, but a very different *kind* of servant than the Nurse. His comedy is primarily physical and visual, and he never subordinates his theatrical identity (as Kemp, a famous clown) into a narrative identity required by the plot. In place of the stage direction "Enter Peter", the 1599 quarto has "Enter Will Kemp." The audience recognizes the performer, not the character. "Shakespeare built up the part, not around a 'characterization', or a name, or a precise household duty, but around a sequence of situations, and around on-going business with props" (Wiles 1987, 92). The stage clown was "a stand-up comic only moonlighting as an actor," and clowns like Kemp, when they appeared in plays, represented sites of contested authorship, with the autonomy of the clown in continual tension with the authority of the playwright, creating a built-in "collapse of fictional integrity" that audiences welcomed, because the clown was in some ways "an avatar of the audience" (Preiss 2014, 183, 23). Kemp was a clown. But the performer who first played the Nurse must have been what we would now call a character actor, capable of tragedy as well as comedy, but known above all for their ability to represent convincingly a fictional identity.

We can see this distinction between the servant-clown and the nurse-mother very clearly in another seventeenth-century adaptation, the

German *Romio und Julieta*, which survives in a manuscript of 1688. That text probably draws upon earlier performances and adaptations in the Germanic world, dating back to the early seventeenth century, and perhaps even to English actors touring on the continent in the 1590s. Unlike *Caius Marius*, *Romio und Julieta* keeps Capulet's Wife, but diminishes the role (for instance, omitting her from the scene that introduces Juliet and the Nurse). But it expands the role of Peter, transforming him into Pickleherring, a stock clown figure in seventeenth-century German drama (Erne and Seidler 2020). As in Shakespeare's play, both the Nurse and the clown appear in the scene where she brings news of Julieta's death to Capolet's Wife, but the German adaptation brings on the clown earlier, and expands the contrast between Nurse and Clown.

Enter Nurse

NURSE O gracious lady, what a calamity! Julieta lies dressed in her best clothes, stretched out and dead.

PICKLEHERRING That's a dirty lie! Because she's stretched out, I must go and see what the matter is with her, for I thoroughly understand stretched-out illnesses. *Exit*

CAPOLET'S WIFE Heaven preserve me! Nurse, how you frighten me!

NURSE Gracious lady, I wish it weren't as I said, but let my nose be cut off if Julieta is not dead. I know it's no joke to lie in bed fully dressed.

Enter Pickleherring

PICKLEHERRING O misery, O distress, O pity, O *mousericordia!* Julieta has died herself dead. O, horrifying news! She lies with hands and feet stretched out and is as stiff as a frozen stockfish.

(5.2.46-61)

Although the Nurse's obsession with Julieta's clothes is eccentric, "it's no joke", and she shares with Julieta's mother the grief and shock of this moment. Pickleherring first asserts his own superior judgment, suggests a prurient interest in a young woman stretched out in bed, then returns with a verbal mishmash that was almost certain to get a laugh—or, rather, a series of laughs.

Like *Romio und Julieta*, Shakespeare's play juxtaposes two comic servants in the Capulet household. But the German adaptation subordinates the Nurse to the Clown. Shakespeare did not: in Peter he incorporated Kemp's brand of anarchic populist comedy, but he subordinated it to his own capacity for comic characterization in the Nurse. But the marriage of those two kinds of comedy also enabled an element of early performances that later interpretations have not been able to reproduce. After the mourning for Juliet's apparent death, both the Nurse and Kemp/Peter disappear from the script. At the end of Brooke's poem, the Nurse "is banisht in her age" (2987-

90). Shakespeare omits this punishment. But curiously, Brooke immediately follows this final reference to the Nurse with a final reference to the servant "Peter". Zeffirelli's film does something similar: after the Prince's "All are punished", mourning characters walk toward us through an arched doorway in pairs, and one of those pairs unites the Nurse and Peter. But Shakespeare might have gone further than Zeffirelli.

In the 1590s, *Romeo and Juliet* would have been immediately followed by a jig, led by the company's premiere writer and performer of jigs, William Kemp. David Wiles has argued that scripted roles for Kemp carved out "unfinished business" that could be satisfyingly enacted in the jig, in a way that "allows the audience to deconstruct the finale of the play": Costard and Armado competing for Jacquenetta, Gobbo wedding his pregnant Moorish princess, Bottom dancing his Bergomask, Dogberry punishing Don John (Wiles 1987, 54-6). All these examples come from comedies, but jigs apparently followed tragedies too.

Can we imagine performances of *The Most Lamentable Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet* ending with the clown-servant wooing, with music and dance, the widowed, lame, mourning nurse-mother?

What's the play about?

Well, there's this... Nurse.

Works Cited

- Allen, Percy. 1922. *The Stage Life of Mrs. Stirling*. London: T. Fisher Unwin.
- An. 1882. "Romeo and Juliet,' at the Lyceum". *The Spectator*, March 11: 326.
- An. 1935. *Evening Standard*, 18 October.
- Bate, Jonathan. 1982. "An Herb by Any Other Name: *Romeo and Juliet*, IV.iv.56". *Shakespeare Quarterly* 33 (2): 336.
- Berger, Thomas L., William C. Bradford, and Sidney L. Sondergard. 1998. *An Index of Characters in Early Modern English Drama: Printed Plays, 1500-1660: Revised Edition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourus, Terri. 2005. "Romeo & Juliet". *Shakespeare Bulletin* 23 (3): 117-19.
- Brooke, Arthur. 1957. *The Tragicall Historie of Romeus and Juliet*. In *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, edited by Geoffrey Bullough, Vol. 1, 284-363. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Campbell, Linda. 1989. "Wet-nurses in early modern England: some evidence from the Townshend archive". *Medical History* 33 (3): 360-70.
- Chernaik, Warren. 2004. "Nokes, James". ODNB. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/20238> (Accessed July 13, 2022).
- Cibber, Colley. 1968. *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Coleridge, S.T. 1971. *Coleridge on Shakespeare: The Text of the Lectures of 1811-12*.

- London: Routledge.
- Cookman, A.V. 1935. "Romeo in the West End". *New York Times*, November 17: 2.
- Darlington, W. A. 1935. *Daily Telegraph*, 18 October.
- Denham, Reginald. 1958. *Stars in My Hair*. London: T. Werner Laurie.
- Downes, John. 1987. *Roscius Anglicanus*. London: Society for Theatre Research.
- Dryden, John. 1978. "Defence of the Epilogue. Or, *An Essay on the Dramatick Poetry of the last Age*". In *The Works of John Dryden*, vol. 11, edited by John Loftis and David Stuart Rhodes. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Erne, Lukas, and Kareen Seidler. 2020. *Early Modern German Shakespeare: Hamlet and Romeo and Juliet: Der Besrtrafte Brudermord and Romio und Julieta in Translation*. London: Arden Shakespeare.
- Everett, Barbara. 1972. "Romeo and Juliet: The Nurse's Story". *Critical Quarterly* 13: 129-39.
- Fildes, Valerie A. 1986. *Breasts, Bottles and Babies: a History of Infant Feeding*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Findlay, Alison. 2010. *Women in Shakespeare: A Dictionary*. London: Continuum.
- Forbes, Bryan. 1977. *Ned's Girl: The Authorized Biography of Dame Edith Evans*. London: Elm Tree Books.
- Gildenhuis, Faith, ed. 1996. *A Gathering of Griseldas: Three Sixteenth-Century Texts*. Ottawa: Dovehouse Editions.
- Granville-Barker, Harley. 1935. *Prefaces to Shakespeare: Second Series*. London: Routledge.
- Hall, Stuart. 1961. "Verona Betrayed". *New Statesman*, 25 August: 253.
- Jackson, Russell. 2003. *Shakespeare at Stratford: Romeo and Juliet*. London: The Arden Shakespeare.
- Johnson, Samuel. 1968. In *Johnson on Shakespeare*, edited by Arthur Sherbo, 2 vols. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Jones, Henry A. 2004. "Barry, Elizabeth". *ODNB* (Accessed July 13, 2022).
- Kerrigan, John. 2016. *Shakespeare's Binding Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lee, Hermione. 2021. *Tom Stoppard: A Life*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Loehlin, James N., ed. 2002. *Romeo and Juliet*. Shakespeare in Production. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lyly, John. 2010. *Mother Bombie*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Marston, Westland. 1888. *Our Recent Actors*, 2 vols. London: Sampson Low.
- National Portrait Gallery Image Collection*. 2014, London: National Portrait Gallery, NPGx38810, <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/> (Accessed July 13, 2022).
- Otway, Thomas. 1680. *The History and Fall of Caius Marius*. London: Thomas Flesher.
- Paster, Gail Kern. 1993. *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Preiss, Richard. 2014. *Clowning and Authorship in Early Modern Theatre*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Riley, Denise. 2019. *Time Lived, Without Its Flow*. London: Picador.
- Rowell, George. 1986. "Mercutio as Romeo: William Terriss in *Romeo and Juliet*". In *Shakespeare and the Victorian Stage*, edited by Richard Foulkes, 87-96. Cam-

- bridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Scott, Charlotte. 2018. *The Child in Shakespeare*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Shakespeare, William. 2016. *Romeo and Juliet*. In *The New Oxford Shakespeare: Complete Works: Modern Critical Edition*, edited by Gary Taylor, John Jowett, Terri Bourus, and Gabriel Egan. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Shipley, Joseph T. 1935. "The Week on the Stage". *The New Leader* (New York City), February 16: 24
- Spevack, Marvin. 1968. *A Complete and Systematic Concordance to the Works of Shakespeare*, Vol. 3. Hildesheim: Georg Olms.
- Starkey, David. 2001. *Elizabeth: The Struggle for the Throne*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Stonier, G.W. 1935. *New Statesman*, 26 October.
- Stoppard, Tom. 1998. *Shakespeare in Love: A Screenplay*. New York: Hyperion.
- Taylor, Nancy. 2005. *Women Direct Shakespeare in America: Productions from the 1990s*. Cranbury, N.J.: Associated University Presses.
- Terry, Ellen. 1908. *The Story of My Life: Recollections and Reflections*. New York: McClure.
- Trewin, J.C. 1964. *Shakespeare on the English Stage 1900-1964*. London: Barrie and Rockliff.
- Urkowitz, Steven. 2017. "Shakespeare Revises Juliet, the Nurse, and Lady Capulet in *Romeo and Juliet*." In *The Politics of Female Alliance in Early Modern England*, edited by Christina Luckyj and Nianh J. O'Leary, 185-206. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Weis, René. 2015. "Angelica's Susan: A Challenge from Real Life?". In *Studies in Victorian and Modern Literature: A Tribute to John Sutherland*, edited by William Baker, 295-304. Madison, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press.
- ed. 2012. *Romeo and Juliet*. Arden Shakespeare. London: Bloomsbury.
- Wells, Stanley, ed. 1996. "The Challenges of *Romeo and Juliet*". In *Romeo and Juliet and Its Afterlife (Shakespeare Survey 49)*, edited by Stanley Wells, 1-14. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 1980. "Juliet's Nurse: the uses of inconsequentiality". In *Shakespeare's Styles: Essays in honour of Kenneth Muir*, edited by Philip Edwards, Inga-Stina Ewbank and G.K. Hunter, 51-66. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- White, Paul Whitfield, ed. 1992. *Reformation Biblical Drama in England*. New York: Garland.
- Wiggins, Martin. 2013. *British Drama 1533-1642: A Catalogue*, Vol. 3: 1590-1597. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 2012. *British Drama 1533-1642: A Catalogue*, Vol. I: 1533-1566. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wiles, David. 1987. *Shakespeare's clown: Actor and text in the Elizabethan Playhouse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

