

How Juliet is treated by her parents and the Nurse

The representation of women in Romeo and Juliet are typical of the social expectations of the 16th century. Women were regarded as second class citizens and beneath men and there to only clean the house and serve the men. Women were not as well educated as men and were not provided the same job opportunities, often it was the desire of wealthy parents that their daughters should get married young, often to men considerably older than themselves, in order for them to have a secure future. Although Capulet says towards the start of the play for Paris to 'let two more summers wither in their pride, ere we may think her ripe to be a bride,' advising Paris to allow Juliet to mature until she is 16 before marrying, it is not unusual for him to change his mind and insist she marries Paris.

Capulet speaks to Juliet as though she were an object, saying that his own daughter is 'unworthy' of marrying Paris as she is objecting to the wedding which she is being forced to go through. He says that she has no choice but to attend the wedding or he will take her there by force, 'Or I will drag thee on a hurdle thither' showing how women had no control over their own destiny and that their own desires are not respected. The fact that Juliet remains polite regardless of her father's anger and repeated insults shows how women were expected to act. She knows that her father has done what he believes is right for his daughter, and she thanks him for that but says she cannot accept his offering, 'thankful even for hate, that is meant love.' Juliet pleads with her father to hear her opinion and the reason why she is unable to marry Paris, for she has already married Romeo, however he speaks over her saying, 'Speak not, reply not, do not answer me.'

Juliet appeals to her mother for help and is met with the response of 'Talk not to me, for I'll not speak a word: Do as thou wilt, for I have done with thee.' Lady Capulet, too, is on the side of Capulet believing that Juliet is acting irrationally and that she is selfish. The fact that Lady Capulet does not defend her daughter when Capulet threatens to hit her by saying, 'My fingers itch' shows that violence from men towards women would not be met with as much horror as it would today. This is suggestive of a violent relationship between the couple, something common in the 16th century as men displayed their dominance over women.

Upon Capulet entering Juliet's chambers he is in high spirits, talking in extended metaphor about the death of Tybalt. He mistakes Juliet's emotion as sorrow at the loss of her cousin and compares her feelings to the sea 'For still thy eyes, which I may call the sea,

Do ebb and flow with tears;' this is one way in which he shows his calm and good natured feelings towards Juliet. From this, it is possible to conclude that Juliet and Capulet have a good relationship so long as Juliet is doing what she is told to do. Evidence to support this comes from the change in tone and attitude towards her when she admits that she does not wish to marry Paris, exclaiming 'doth she not count her blest.'