

Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen  
Bachelorarbeit im Hauptfach Anglistik / Amerikanistik

# **"In the wrong light anyone can look like a darkness:"<sup>1</sup>**

Shakespeare's Tybalt in contemporary Fanfiction.

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B.A. Anglistik / Amerikanistik, PO 2016/2017

8. Fachsemester

Betreuung: Prof. Angelika Zirker

Abgabedatum: 22.10.2021

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<sup>1</sup> Title taken from Siken, Richard: "War of the Foxes." I chose Siken's poetry as he has been called the "Poet Laureate of Fanfiction" for how often his poetry is taken for fanfiction titles. For more info, see Carlson.

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## Introduction

The way we engage with Shakespeare has taken many forms over the past 400 years. From Bardolatry, over Romantic revision, both popular and academic discourses, to fans and fandom. Recent publications, such as the Arden Shakespeare's *Shakespeare and Geek Culture* or Jonathan Pope's *Shakespeare's Fans: Adapting the Bard in the Age of Media Fandom*, have started exploring what it means to be a Shakespeare 'fan' in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. One avenue of fan practice discussed in them is the writing of fanfiction, that is, transformative works of a source material commonly but not exclusively written by female and / or marginalised fans who engage in fan-spaces and the production of fan content. They often represent diverse and contemporary readings of Shakespeare plays that reflect both the text (and what it may lack) as well as the 'fan' discourse surrounding Shakespeare. I would like to examine these readings and the arguments that fanfiction makes about its Shakespeare characters to see the ways in which the fanfics engage, question and analyse their primary source. I argue that fanfiction offers a unique perspective on Shakespeare in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that may allow us to explore Shakespeare texts in new ways and I seek to illustrate this in the following paper.

I will begin by outlining the way in which fanfiction works as a text and specifically, how it works in relation to Shakespeare. After, I will offer an explanation of why I focus on *Romeo and Juliet's* Tybalt, as well as present a close-reading. On the basis of that I will explore different aspects and particularities of how Tybalt fanfiction engages with the text, fan discourse, and academic discourse to make arguments about Tybalt. From that, I will present my conclusion.

## Methodology

Before I begin my analysis of fanfiction as a textual category, I would like to take a moment to clarify my terminology a bit further. I use 'fanfiction' to refer to the text generally, and 'fanfic' or 'fanfics' when talking about a particular text at hand. I have chosen 20 sample fanfics from *Archive of Our Own*. The process of selection was rather simple: From the fanfics in which Tybalt is listed as a character, I took the 20 fanfics that had amassed the most kudos (likes) at the time of my selection. This list has already changed.

I did not concern myself with quality or content in my selection. That means that some of the fanfics are cross-overs with other Shakespeare plays and some are specific to *Romeo and Juliet*. Some are tame, others show graphic descriptions of sex and violence. There are some that are less than a few hundred words long and yet a few that are of novel length. I attempted to remain as impartial to the fanfics as possible and read each of them regardless of personal preferences.

## Fanfiction and the Bard

The definition of fanfiction I proposed earlier is the one that I found most apt for the introduction. However, I still find it lacking in satisfactorily describing what fanfiction is—especially compared to other derivative and transformative texts. What is it that sets fanfiction apart from other derivative texts?

I would like to take a moment to examine this question further as I believe the difference to be essential to any effective reading of fanfiction and any given fanfiction text.

A common definition of fanfiction is the one presented by Judith Fathallah at the beginning of her monography *Fanfiction and the Author*, as "the unauthorised adaptation and re-writing of media texts" (9). That certainly works to an extent, but already presents us with a small problem: the fanfiction I will be writing about is not unauthorised and this is true for many other works that fall under the yet rather vague header of fanfiction. Indeed, meltha, one of the fanfiction authors whose work I will be discussing later, even has this to say in their preface: "Disclaimer: All characters are created by William Shakespeare, aka Billy the Bodacious Bard. No copyright infringement is intended, though I would be deeply curious to see who would actually file a lawsuit on this one. Ah, the joys of public domain." While the existence of a disclaimer implicitly refers to fanfiction written from copyrighted works, the fanfic in question is not.<sup>2</sup>

The Oxford English Dictionary offers little additional insight: *fan fiction* has been added as a draft addition to the entry of *fan* in 2004 and is rather broad. Here,

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<sup>2</sup> "Disclaimers, for instance, were devised to ensure a certain kind of protection against legal complaints; but nowadays, they have frequently become a simple formula that is often made fun of by more or less openly acknowledging that the fans do not own the metatext according to copyright and trademark restrictions" (Herzog).

fanfiction is defined as "fiction, usually fantasy or science fiction, written by a fan rather than a professional author, esp. that based on already-existing characters from a television series, book, film, etc." ("fan, n.2."). Highlighted here is the difference between fan authorship and professional authorship, a rather delicate line, where opinions on what fanfiction is or can be greatly diverge. One strain argues that the difference between fan and professional authorship is arbitrary: the idea is essentially that derivation and fanfiction are the very same thing only with different names. As Margaret Atwood puts it: "It's a very old thing to have characters and stories take on a life of their own and generate other stories. Now we call it fan fiction... but it goes to mythology, to the backstories of the Odyssey. There were numerous stories about Penelope. There were numerous stories about Ulysses. And then people wrote more" (qtd. in Miller). So purely textually, there is little difference to be found between any particular Shakespeare fanfic and the *Hogarth Shakespeare Series*. The argument made here would be that there effectively is none—that fanfiction is as legitimate a literary text as a published one and suffers devaluation through both its status as a 'fan' work as well as because of its often female and / or marginalised authorship. Jonathan Pope, in *Shakespeare's Fans: Adapting the Bard in the Age of Media Fandom*, holds that "[a]ssociating fanfic with a primarily juvenile reader- or authorship [...] largely dismisses the ways in which fan fiction often does the work of literary criticism" (110). However, Henry Jenkins, author of *Textual Poachers*, sees the difference between fan and professional as exactly the defining feature of fanfiction. According to him, adaptations fulfil "some of the same functions as fan fiction, but it can't be fan fiction by definition [...]. It is not arising from fandom and the modes of production that fans are involved in" (qtd. in Miller). That is not to say that writing an adaptation of a text one likes makes it fanfiction, but rather that the specific discourse (fandom) that the text was produced in makes a difference to the production of the text.

The definition of fanfiction is caught up in questions of legitimacy, author- and readership, textual production, functions, and literary criticism. I would like to stay with Jenkins' proposal a bit longer: it posits that fans within specific fan discourses have unique modes of creative production, one of them being fanfiction, that are separate from other derivative texts precisely because of the context they exist in, and furthermore, that this allows these texts to fulfil functions beyond the scope of non-fandom derivative texts. This brings me to two questions: one, would it not be more accurate to describe fanfiction

as a mode of textual production rather than a text in itself? If fanfiction is a derivative text that is always tied to a specific discourse and mode of production within that discourse, then I would argue that it is more beneficial to think of fanfiction as textual production and a way to engage with a primary text, rather than a distinct text in itself. Secondly, what are the functions that fanfiction can fulfil that other derivative texts cannot? Pope mentions literary criticism—and I believe it is a comparison that warrants some thought: I've discussed how fanfiction could be understood as a way to produce a secondary text emerging from a discourse for the same discourse, similarly to how academic papers work in relation to their subject. But I would like to briefly look at the interaction between fanfic text and fandom a bit closer. In fanfiction, there exists the idea of IC (in-character) and OOC (out-of-character), which is used in fanfic notes to discuss whether a character in any particular fanfic is written in a way that is considered accurate or believable. One example can be found in MsScarlettRice's introductory note from one of the sample fanfics: "Probably some OOC going on for everyone, but this is Shakespeare fanfiction so what did you expect?" In another fanfic of the sample, author grxntxire warns the readers through a tag that the fanfic will include "false depictions of tybalt being an ass because lets be real hes actually just a sweet baby angel." Fandom requires fanfic authors to make compelling arguments for their characterisation to be accepted or otherwise point out that the character being written inaccurately is intentional. The textual production of fanfiction includes textual analysis, or rather specifically, character analysis. As fanfic writer LeitnerEater expresses: "If only my high school english teachers could see me now, still analyzing Shakespeare characters but for the purpose of making kinlists and deciding which characters would have been on 2013 tumblr."<sup>3</sup> But fanfiction is not produced solely by analysing the fan object alone, as Pope mentions, as authors will also look to other fanfics "to mine the authenticity of characters" (106). A fanfic exists in relationship to its primary text but also engages with and is engaged by other fanfics that may choose to perpetuate or expand the characterisation and analysis.

Specifically talking about Shakespearean criticism, Pope argues that what we see in Shakespeare fanfiction is "reverence [...] frequently counterbalanced with irreverence" and that fanfiction or fan play

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<sup>3</sup> As UrbanDictionary puts it: "A kinlist is someones list of kins, or characters they believe to be/ relate to." Tumblr is a social media platform frequently associated with fandoms and fan blogging.

democratizes access to a canonical author like Shakespeare by authorizing all readers to play in his worlds and with his characters, and by incorporating him and his works into our contemporary media and cultural environment. [...] [T]he juxtaposition of ironic distance *and* proximity between Shakespeare and modern popular culture established by many fics ultimately contemporizes Shakespeare in a way that complements scholarly criticism. [...] In these cases, fan fiction does the work of criticism—pointing to the misogyny, victim blaming, or other prejudices of a text—through different means. Such fan critiques undoubtedly emerge partly from the paradoxical reluctance of academic criticism to embrace anachronistic readings of the plays, for example, even as theory and criticism are frequently anachronistic. [...] One of the core strengths of fan fiction and one of the primary reasons that we should be studying it more [...] is because of the way in which it insistently situates individual readers and writers, and their individual responses to and interpretations of a text, at the center of a text's meaning (125-7).

Of course, not every fanfic will consciously do the work of literary criticism. But between how fandom works as a discourse and the individual analysis that goes into the production of a fanfic, fanfic authors do make arguments about the characters they write about. For me this raises the question: How are these arguments constructed in fanfic and do they constitute a legitimate academic inquiry?

The discussions around what fanfiction is have led to diverging and sometimes mutually exclusive definitions that describe different aspects of fanfiction but struggle to resolve it in its entirety. But for the purpose of this paper, I will read fanfiction as a mode of textual production to examine the way it produces its arguments about the primary text and how they may complement scholarly criticism.

## Why Tybalt?

When one thinks of characters in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, the name Tybalt is perhaps not the very first that comes to mind. He is likely most remembered as the hot-headed Capulet who stands between Romeo and Juliet, and as the character who kills Mercutio and is killed by Romeo in retaliation, the climax from which the events turn towards their tragic ending. While he is integral to the plot of the play—or rather perhaps, his death is—he only has about 36 speaking lines. In the grand total of the play, that is little more than one percent. More curiously even, he is mentioned in altogether 44 lines after his death; the play says more about him and his death than it allows Tybalt himself to speak.

Here we have a character who features comparatively little in the play at hand and appears important only in death. And yet, if we look at fanfiction of *Romeo and Juliet* we will notice that Tybalt features as a character far more often than within Shakespeare. Within the Shakespeare tag on the fanfiction archive website *Archive of Our Own*, Tybalt appears as a character in 8,8% of all Shakespeare-play related works, exactly 8 times more than he speaks in *Romeo and Juliet*. Within the *Romeo and Juliet* tag alone, he appears in 38,5% of the fanfiction archived, making him the fourth most frequently appearing character, above Juliet and beneath Mercutio, Romeo, and Benvolio, in that order. While that certainly poses the question of *why* Tybalt is so popular in Shakespeare fan spaces, the fact that he *is* so comparatively over-represented is a chance to take a closer look at Tybalt in fanfiction.

## Tybalt

Tybalt is introduced to the audience in the very first scene of the play with his sword in hand. Seeing Benvolio trying to break up a Montague-Capulet fight with his sword raised, Tybalt addresses him thus: "What, art thou drawn upon these heartless hinds? / Turn thee, Benvolio, and look upon thy death" (1.1.57-58). Evans suggests that for Tybalt, Benvolio engaging in a fight with servants would demean him (71n57). Benvolio replies that his intention was only to "keep the peace" (1.1.59) and that Tybalt either put away his sword or help him break up the servants fighting. Tybalt, angered at Benvolio's bid for peace, says he hates the word of peace as much he hates "hell, all Montagues, and thee" (1.1.63) and challenges Benvolio, who he calls a coward, to fight him.

I would like to offer three different—albeit not mutually exclusive—readings of this scene, each of them set against other parts of the play that feature Tybalt. The ambiguities of this interaction yield nuance when juxtaposed against the very diverse characterisations we have of Tybalt: The way he is seen by the Montagues and Mercutio, the things Tybalt says himself, and finally the way Tybalt is remembered by Juliet and the nurse.

Both Mercutio and Benvolio mention Tybalt, though even between them there are minor differences. When they talk about Tybalt's letter to Romeo, Mercutio asks whether Romeo is a "man to encounter Tybalt" (2.4.16) in a duel, prompting Benvolio to ask why it should be so important that the challenge comes from Tybalt. While Benvolio and Tybalt recognise each other, Mercutio furthermore appears to have history with



Tybalt—at least enough to form an opinion on him: "More than prince of cats. O, he's the courageous captain of compliments. He fights as you sing prick-songs, keeps time, distance, and proportion" (2.4.18-20). Mercutio continues likening Tybalt's fighting to dancing, including at the end fencing-specific terms unknown to Benvolio, who makes his confusion clear. This proves Mercutio's point, as he continues to mock this new trend of behaviour—behaviour that Tybalt seems to be incorporating should Mercutio be believed. Evans notes that the "captain of compliments" should be read as Tybalt being knowledgeable in the "laws of ceremony" and that "Tybalt is sarcastically described by Mercutio as one of the new (to England) Italianate 'duellists' [...], who 'quarrel in print, by the book' (AYLI 5.4.90)" (119n18-19). This is also the first instance of Mercutio calling Tybalt the prince of cats, a metaphor that he continues up until his death: When Tybalt ignores Mercutio in order to confront Romeo in 3.1, Mercutio calls out to him as "Tybalt, you ratcatcher" (3.1.68). And when Tybalt asks Mercutio what he wants from him, Mercutio's reply is "nothing but one of your nine lives" (3.1.70). And, finally, after Tybalt grievously injured him, Mercutio waves it away as little more than a "scratch" (3.1.85). Tybalt does not reply to Mercutio's taunts, but given Mercutio's other way of characterising Tybalt as well as his insistence on the metaphor, it may not be far off to argue that the Tybalt being called the prince of cats is more than just a homonym. While Mercutio takes offence at this, he still describes Tybalt as graceful (he fights as one would dance) and proper (captain of compliments). If we listen to Mercutio, attributing a certain cat-like elegance to Tybalt seems entirely suited.

It is Benvolio who first describes Tybalt's temper: Not only is he "fiery," but he "breathe[s] defiance" and makes even the winds themselves scorn him (1.1.100-4). While in the context of Benvolio's account of Tybalt's introduction "breathed defiance" simply refers to Tybalt refusing Benvolio's attempts at peace, the imagery of Tybalt needing to defy as he needs air is amusing and not entirely misplaced either.

The Tybalt that emerges from both Mercutio and Benvolio's descriptions is prone to resistance and eager to fight. He is capable of fighting too—but his implied elegance and adherence to form is the subject of Mercutio's derision. From the commentary found in *As You Like It*, Tybalt's style of fencing is beautiful and made for duelling but should prove useless in a 'real' fight. To Mercutio he is, for lack of cat-like figure of speech, 'all bark and no bite.' If we are to read 1.1 in that light, Tybalt engaging Benvolio in a fight is both representative of his eagerness for violence and loose temper,

while his offence at Benvolio fighting servants springs from his strict focus on form and social standing, as is implied by Mercutio.

But what can we glean about Tybalt from what little lines he is given? What character emerges only from that? Apart from 1.1, Tybalt only appears in person and with lines in 1.5 and finally 3.1. He is briefly mentioned in 1.2, but while we learn of his letter to Romeo in 2.4, Tybalt himself is notably absent in the entire second act.

The first mention after 1.1 is when Romeo reads out the list of attendants of Capulet's upcoming feast, among which are Tybalt and Mercutio. While Mercutio is listed as the brother of Valentine, Tybalt is listed as the cousin of a "Signior Valentio" (1.2.70). The names share the same root, the Latin *valens*, *valentio*, that is strong and / or healthy, although Valentine is also more directly associated with romantic love. While it may have been a perfectly innocuous and arbitrary choice, it does have some logic that ironically, both Mercutio and Tybalt are associated with romantic love and strength, when it is specifically both of their actions that lead to the tragedy. They are already being 'coupled,' or rather paired up in that sense.

After that, the next time we hear of Tybalt (and indeed hear Tybalt) is during Capulet's feast. He is among the attendance, but his first speaking line is after Romeo sees Juliet and makes to approach her. Tybalt hears him speak and, recognising Romeo's voice as that of a Montague, calls a servant to fetch him his rapier (1.5.53-4). He takes Romeo, whom he derogatorily calls a "slave," as showing "scorn" for the Capulet feast with his presence alone and vows "by the stock and honor of [his] kin,/ To strike [Romeo] dead [he] holds it not a sin" (1.5.54-58). His language here is religiously charged, he specifically refers to the feast as a solemnity, which, while it can be used outside of religious contexts and simply refer to celebrations, is also the word used for Catholic feast days, including those celebrating saints. His reasoning is strictly familial piety: Romeo's trespass is to him an offence against Capulet honour and indeed the Capulets themselves. But when Tybalt approaches Capulet himself about this, Capulet appears collected and tells Tybalt: "Content thee, gentle coz. Let him alone" (1.5.64). Capulet tells Tybalt that Romeo is known as a "virtuous" and "well-governed youth," (1.5.67) and that he will not disrespect him in his home, even if he is a Montague. I find it noteworthy that the first adjective Capulet uses to calm Tybalt is "gentle," when until now nothing would have indicated to us that Tybalt is—in fact, he behaved anything but gentle when last we saw him. Capulet is also rather duplicitous: in 1.1 he was just as ready to incite a fight as Tybalt is here and once Tybalt disagrees with his assessment of Romeo, Capulet's

demeanour towards him turns from calm to outright biting. He puts Tybalt into place, and "gentle coz" turns into "goodman boy" (1.5.76), an insult that reduces him in both his social standing and his masculinity, "saucy boy" (1.5.82), and "princecox" (1.5.85), "a pert, conceited youth" (99n85). Capulet further insinuates that this is nothing but Tybalt's fantasy of wanting to play the hero ("you'll be the man!" (1.5.80)). Capulet returns to his guests, and Tybalt is left to his own, and in two couplets expresses both his anger and that, while he will obey, Romeo's intrusion may seem "sweet," but will turn into "bitt'rest gall" (1.5.91). Following his couplets, we immediately get the encounter sonnet and are back to religious imagery.

The next time he is on stage after this is in 3.1, when he approaches Mercutio and Benvolio in search of Romeo. He is surprisingly polite in talking to them, even with Mercutio attempting to bait him into a fight. His quarrel is not with them. He excuses himself once Romeo enters with "peace be with you" (3.1.49), an intriguing choice considering his seeming dislike of the word "peace" as he expressed in 1.1, while at the same time also being a distinctly religious phrasing. His opening words to Romeo are "the love I bear thee can afford/ No better term than this: thou art a villain" (3.1.54), prompting Romeo's rebuttal citing his real love towards Tybalt. The note here reads "Surprisingly ironic coming from the forthright Tybalt. Some eds. Prefer Q1 'hate'" (137n53) and I wonder whether this is indeed ironic. Romeo meeting 'love' with 'love' makes more sense than meeting 'hate' with 'love,' and if we take Tybalt to call this 'love,' I wonder if he is sincere. Tybalt so far has expressed his familial piety with swordfight and in 1.5, his love for the Capulets was met with punishment. When Tybalt tells Romeo "Boy, this shall not excuse the injuries/ That thou hast done to me" (1.5. 59-60), he uses the same language Capulet used towards him earlier. For Tybalt, familial piety, violence, and love all converge and Tybalt is nothing but sincere in his actions. Capulet's abuse highlights his youth more than anything else, as well as him wanting to be the (masculine) hero, the attempt of which we can arguably see in 3.1.

Read in this light, Tybalt in 1.1 is acting out of a sense of love for his family, a sense of honour and perhaps valour, the expression of which, in patriarchal, masculine Verona, is violence. His conflation of hate against "hell, all Montagues, and [Benvolio]" (1.1.63) may further be understood as, quite literally, familial *piety*, as faith and familial duty appear to be bound in him, at least from what little lines we get from him.

But yet a third Tybalt emerges, a Tybalt we only learn of after his death: To Lady Capulet, Tybalt was a "dear kinsman" (3.1.139), to the Nurse, in perhaps a sincere

moment, he was "the best friend [she] had!/[...] courteous Tybalt, honest gentleman" (3.2.61-2), and to Juliet her "dearest cousin" (3.2.66). Capulet's only worry is outward appearance: "It may be thought we held [Tybalt] carelessly,/ Being our kinsman, if we revel too much" (3.5.25-6). If anything, Tybalt was held very dear and was well loved by the Capulets, even if the only interaction we see between him and Capulet himself is a scene of abuse. Who was Tybalt to the Capulets? What love did he share with them, that of all cousins, Tybalt was the one dearest to Juliet? And the Nurse hints at a relationship even more intriguing: the best friend she had? A courteous gentleman? Even if we take this in the Nurse's usual meter of hyperbole, it is still a significant address.

If we trust the Capulets' assessment of Tybalt, it is easy to see why Benvolio, though a Montague, would try to reason with Tybalt. It is clear he knows Tybalt in 1.1, not as well as Mercutio, but well enough to recognise him. One argument is that it is his lack of knowledge that makes Benvolio believe that he can speak to Tybalt—but if Tybalt were indeed a courteous gentleman, it stands to reason that Benvolio could try to appeal to Tybalt here. When Tybalt asks Benvolio "What, drawn and talk of peace? I hate the word [...]. Have at thee, coward" (1.1.61), one possible reading would be that, fiery and prone to violence as he is, he really does hate the word 'peace.' But given his characterisation by the Nurse and Juliet, I would like to argue that Tybalt may take offence at Benvolio *speaking* of peace while his actions are violent (he has his sword drawn), rather than peace itself. He specifies his dislike of the word, not the concept itself.

In the end, Tybalt is a multifaceted character. He is violent, fiery, vain, meticulous and almost petty in regards to proper form and social class. He is a child, a boy, quick to anger, but only in matters of family, and wants to play the hero. He is held dear, a nephew, a friend, a cousin to romance or strength, a courteous gentleman. He is perhaps gentle. Tybalt is all these things at the same time, which allows for immensely ambiguous readings of what little time on the stage he has. What then, does fanfiction make of the ambiguities inherent to his character?

### **"a stupid, naive child that wants to be loved:"<sup>4</sup> Tybalt on the Inside**

Compared to other antagonists in Shakespeare, Tybalt is only given very few lines and not a single monologue. It is perhaps only accurate to his character that he acts more than

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<sup>4</sup> Taken from "By Any Other Name" by grapefruitsnacks.

he speaks, but then the same could be said for Hotspur in 1H4, who in a play of roughly the same length has over ten times the line count of Tybalt.<sup>5</sup> The glimpses Shakespeare gives us into Tybalt's inner workings are rare: the audience learns strikingly little about Tybalt from Tybalt himself. In the following I will look at the way in which the 20 sample fanfics reaffirm or subvert this, both through the dramatic role Tybalt is given as well as through whether Tybalt acts a point of focalisation, and how, given the very few lines of Tybalt, this is negotiated.

In terms of the sample, only three of the fanfics feature Tybalt as a point of focalisation, though not exclusively. All other 17, even those with dynamic focalisation, do not invite the reader into Tybalt's thoughts and feelings. Of those former three, Tybalt is not only a main character, but also one part of one of the respective main pairings: Romantically with Benvolio in the case of Penguin\_Lord's "Supernovas and Fallen Stars," romantically with Mercutio in quwinto's "Murder's Not A Hobby For The Cautious," and both finally and surprisingly, romantically with Paris in grapefruitsnacks' "By Any Other Name." Of the remaining 17, only eight<sup>6</sup> feature Tybalt as a main character, with nine<sup>7</sup> relegating him to the role of a side character or antagonist.

Especially in those nine latter fanfics, Tybalt's antagonism is always in opposition to Mercutio rather than Romeo—their quarrel features as a driving force of conflict next to the feud itself. Furthermore, in most of them, there is a very distinctive absence of both Lord Montague and Lord Capulet. Pargoletta's "Caro," in which the main plot is about Mercutio and his little brother Valentine escaping their abusive father, is one of the few fanfics which acknowledge the existence of adult figures in Verona. And yet, even this fanfic has Mercutio suggesting that something in teenage Tybalt reminds him of said abusive father. In a later passage, "Caro" has this to say about the feud: "If anyone could be said to fan the flames of the feud between the Montagues and the Capulets the most, it was Tybalt." This is similar to a line from grxntxire's "Don't Tell Romeo" about

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<sup>5</sup> Hotspur has 559 lines to 1H4's 3045 total lines (18,35%) whereas Tybalt has 36 lines to RJ's 3096 total lines (1,16%).

<sup>6</sup> See: MsScarlettRice's "An Impending Storm," Moontwyrine's "Curiosity killed the cat," MercutioLives' "like fire and powder, which as they kiss consume," NotTonightJosephine's "Make it a Word and a Blow," glyphsbowtie's "Rogue," Meltha's "The Madness of Love," Hexx's "Wind and Stars," and azurish's "Hell is empty (all the devils of Verona)."

<sup>7</sup> See: Pargoletta's "Caro," LeitnerEater's "Mercutio Makes a Discord," grxntxire's "Don't Tell Romeo," geode's "apartment one-oh-four," evol\_love's "I Am Too Fond," musicskies' "It only hurts when I think," fairyqueenmab's "Love Cannot Hit the Mark," SubwayWolf's "Sail Into the Sun," and LieutenantSaavik's "what knife through yonder ribcage breaks!"

whether all Capulets were bad people: "Maybe not all the Capulets, but definitely Tybalt, who was terrible enough for the whole family." Tybalt is the only Capulet of the same age as Romeo, Benvolio, Mercutio, and Juliet, and, thus, it is easy to see why he is chosen as a villain of convenience.

More than that, these fanfics especially reaffirm both Tybalt's role in the play, as well as the Verona of Shakespeare's making. When Harold Goddard expresses that the "hatred of the hostile houses in *Romeo and Juliet* is an inheritance" (119), we see this represented in the sample fanfics as they not only reaffirm the absence of both patriarchs from the plot action, but more often than not, shift the blame for the feud unto Tybalt, rather than the adults. Raymond V. Utterback, on Mercutio's death, reminds us that the "play receives much of its distinctive character from the sense of threat emanating from this background," but that for Mercutio "the real threat is tangential to the feud; it is personified in Tybalt himself" (112). I would argue that these fanfics not only reaffirm the sense of threat, but that very often, due to the point of focalisation being either Mercutio himself or someone positively inclined towards him, the threat of the feud and the threat of Tybalt to Mercutio become conflated, and with that, the responsibility of the feud and its violence falls to Tybalt, who has only very little to say for himself.

Even the other eight fanfics, though some of them certainly cast Tybalt in a far more generous light, still present him opposite Mercutio or Benvolio, and even though he often is the object of desire in those cases, that desire is intermingled with the hatred and violence that the feud—and thus Tybalt—generates. We get the guesses of Benvolio and Mercutio as to what Tybalt may be thinking, and given the tendency of the narration in these fanfics to skirt the line between intra- and extra-diegetic, we may even assume that they are right, but it is still an outside analysis.

But what of the remaining three fanfics? For the sake of brevity I will not dwell on the first two I mentioned very long, though they are very different from each other: "Supernovas and Fallen Stars" presents us with a Tybalt who is, against all odds and expectations, a rather cunning character. It is perhaps worth mentioning that Tybalt is specifically older here, in his late twenties, when all other characters are around 20. He is assured in his masculinity and confident, and his anger stems from his sensitivities to filial piety and honour being injured. That last part is a reading of Tybalt close to the play, the former however appears odd. Admittedly, that may be because Tybalt is so distinctly childish in the play, when this Tybalt is a grown man and such differences can be

expected. It is certainly in line with a joke made in "Caro," that if he were to survive Verona's feud, Tybalt would grow up to study law: he is not allowed to fight physically any longer, but he can channel his inclination towards conflict into a court. Almost entirely in opposition to that is the Tybalt of "Murder's Not A Hobby For The Cautious," in which Tybalt and Mercutio are reimagined as hired mercenaries, literal partners in crime. Tybalt here is more obstinate and certainly more Catholic<sup>8</sup> and much of his internal dialogue is negotiations with himself to not admit his romantic feelings towards Mercutio. What self-awareness he has is repressed in favour of cathartic violence. This is entirely in line with how Tybalt is characterised in "By Any Other Name," the fanfic that features the most focalisation of Tybalt.

"By Any Other Name" is canon-divergent, meaning it starts as the play does, but diverges from the plot at one point. The point here being a ploy by Mercutio: He marries Juliet so that he can be with Benvolio without any interruption and Romeo can be with Juliet without any interruption. Paris, who is more like his classical namesake than his Shakespearean counterpart, is heart-broken at this and is convinced by Tybalt that something is odd about the marriage. Thus, they conspire to break the happy couple apart, but in attempting to do so, grow close to each other. "By Any Other Name" is the longest fanfic of the sample, counting 113376 words, so only roughly the length of *Sense and Sensibility*. Tybalt grows as a character and changes over time, and his journey is facilitated through self-knowledge. The Tybalt we meet at the start of the fanfic stands juxtaposed to Romeo: whereas Romeo is making his first romantic gestures at Juliet at the party, and is allowed to love and recognise himself in her, Tybalt thinks this to himself: "He decided long ago that there is no better feeling in the world than revenge and hate. They're his lovers, his friends, and his soulmates. No one else can compare." This is the perfect interior to match the exterior seen in the other 17 fanfics. But it does not take long for this to fall apart: Hate cannot sustain him. His interactions with Paris yield this scene: "Paris is looking at Tybalt with sympathy, too much sympathy. It borders too much on pity. He hates it. Nobody should look at him with so much softness," followed by Tybalt thinking that he does not deserve kindness. Even Tybalt has to at one point admit to himself that "underneath his glare and his cruelty, is a stupid, naive child that wants to be loved." However, what this fanfic follows this up with is something that

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<sup>8</sup> Instead of Italy, we find ourselves in the United States, with the only suitable stand-in for Verona being, of course, New Jersey.

was denied to Tybalt in the play, namely that he is allowed to have a moment of proper anagnorisis:

"[The feud] was a coping mechanism. And now that it's gone, he can't move. Reality hit him, and it knocked him out. He's furious at the world for taking his father from him because of a stupid feud. He's furious at Capulet for hurting Juliet and Rosaline. Furious at himself for letting Capulet hurt him, hit him, manipulate him. Furious at himself for liking boys [...]. Furious at the world for being unjust. Mercutio was never the problem, but it was so much easier to blame him. [...] And the words he used against Mercutio? He killed a man for talking like that only weeks ago. He's a literal villain. And he doesn't have anyone to blame but himself."

Not only does this Tybalt grow from his Shakespearean counterpart through the motions of a classical hero, but the tragedy is averted through his recognition, literally changing his hate into love and reversing the fortunes of the play.<sup>9</sup> Another important aspect is that the fanfic goes into the issues of Capulet's abusive patriarchy and the way this informs how Tybalt acts and conceptualises his masculinity. Howard-Hill suggests that "it is not the families' feud that kills the young lovers (and three other young men in the play) but rather, the simple monosyllable boy spoken [by Capulet] in anger, piercing the heart of the young man to whom it was addressed, Tybalt" (127). The fanfic both reaffirms and subverts Tybalt's explicit role in the play through Aristotelian means, while at the same time also reaffirming Verona's abusive patriarchy and its influence on the children who inherited the conflict where the rest appears to forget that detail.

### **"He can have all the trappings of a cantankerous cat:"<sup>10</sup> The Prince of Cats**

It is Mercutio who calls Tybalt the 'Prince of Cats,' and Evans notes that this may be due to the similarity of the name Tybalt to Tybert, the cat-character of *The History of Reynard the Fox* (119n18). It is also Mercutio who keeps using cat metaphors in his interactions with Tybalt, although Tybalt does not respond to them in cat-like manner as far as the play text is concerned. While some of Tybalt's traits may ring in favour of Mercutio's persistent taunts, such as his elegance (2.4.18-19), way of fighting (that is, scratching,

<sup>9</sup> While the fanfic turns the Aristotelian script on the Shakespeare play, and it starts in discord to end in harmony after Tybalt's anagnorisis, I would argue that this also additionally constitutes a changing of Romeo and Juliet's genre from tragedy to comedy.

<sup>10</sup> Taken from "Supernovas and Fallen Stars" by Penguin\_Lord.



rather than piercing, 1.1.102 and 3.1.85) and perhaps vanity (2.4.18-19), these are both largely ambiguous and respond to a contemporary imagination of a cat, rather than perhaps an Early Modern one. Regarding the allusion to Tybert the cat, Joan Ozark Holmer even notes this:

For anyone in the audience familiar with Reynard the Fox Mercutio's sharp-tongued identification of Tybalt as the Prince of Cats undercuts Tybalt's arrogant pretensions because in Reynard Tibert, although reputed wise by the King of Beasts (the lion), is 'not great' but 'little and feeble' and is physically beaten, as well as made to look cowardly and foolish when 'outfoxed' by Reynard.(353)

There are certainly arguments to be made for the self-identification of Mercutio with Reynard: they both have a certain trickster-like wit and Reynard did win against Tybert—but Mercutio's assumption proves a fallacy and his downfall. One fanfic in particular, MercutioLives' "like fire and powder, which as they kiss consume," does have Mercutio contemplating himself as a fox to Tybalt as a cat. More importantly though, Tybert the cat has only very little in common with our Tybalt. That raises a question: Is Tybert also representative of the Early Modern cat? Haylie Swenson points to several instances of Shakespeare using the imagery of "the flattering, pampered, reviled, predatory, 'harmless, necessary' early modern cat" (Swenson) in his plays, ranging from both the said "harmless necessary cat" (MV 4.1.56) and being as "as vigilant as a cat to steal cream" (1H4 4.2.59) to the "foul night-waking cat" Tarquin in *The Rape of Lucrece* (554).<sup>11</sup> More conclusive yet is Edward Topsell's 1607 *The Historie of Foure-Footed Beastes*, in which Topsell describes cats as "watchful and weary beast[s] seldom overtaken, and most attendant to her sport and prey" as well as "neat and cleanly, [...] and fair" and "in all parts a Lioness, except in her sharp ears" (80-81). This further extends to the cat's cruelty in playing with her prey. Topsell further notes that nothing "is more contrary to a Cat, then is wet and water" and that in seeking to warm themselves they "often burn their Coates" (81). Finally, in opposition to dogs, cats will never desert their home, even should their owners leave (81). The loyalty of a cat is to a house, and not the family it belongs to, should we believe Topsell's Early Modern assessment. Karen Raber's opening words to her article "

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<sup>11</sup> There is one possible explanation I could offer for the cats of Shakespeare's works to contain such multitudes: During the 1592-1593 London plague one of the sanitary orders calls to "[s]uffer not any dogs, cattles, or pigs to run about the streets, for they are very dangerous, and apt to carry the infection from place to place" (qtd. in Creighton 355). With *The Rape to Lucrece* being likely written closer to the plague than both MV and 1H4, it is not hard to imagine that cats would be associated with the plague more closely in that time.

How to Do Things with Animals: Thoughts On/With the Early Modern Cat" are thus: "This is an essay about cute furry little cats and kittens" (93). However, as she discusses, the early modern understanding of cats was not necessarily that cute, as "Cats are just, well, alien, insubstantial, frivolous" (94). They are liminal and paradoxical creatures, "cohabiting uneasily with human society" (97):

Skilful and active hunters who prefer warm interior spaces, loyal and sociable companions who refuse to give themselves wholly over to a pack order—these paradoxes confuse and complicate early modern ideas about cats, to the extent that unlike dogs and horses we cannot identify a single, dominant characteristic that unifies cat “nature” as observed by humans. [...] In cats, far more than in dogs and other domesticated animals, and certainly far more than in wild animals, humans have an unsettling mirror of aspects of their own “nature” as willfully, arbitrarily violent toward inappropriate targets. (99-105)

Early modern cats are fascinatingly complex animals and they can signify a variety of meanings. Tybert appears to be as much of an early modern cat as Tybalt himself is: his 'catness' makes itself most apparent in his own seemingly paradoxical nature: he is both "gentle" (1.5.64) and "fiery" (1.1.100), vain and heroic (in his own way), "captain of compliments" (2.4.18) and "princecox" (1.5.85). But when we look at 3.1, Raber's comment on cats being a perfect mirror to the inappropriate, arbitrary violence of humans, strikes true even harsher: of course, Tybalt is mistaken in his target, that we know. But he provides an "unsettling mirror" to both Mercutio and Romeo, as well. Tybalt has done nothing to our knowledge to invoke Mercutio's scorn like that, and their roles are reversed: it is Mercutio who is angry, fiery, and prone to fight now. Romeo finds himself in a similar predicament, and his mirror to Tybalt is even more apparent: In this duel, he has now taken the role of Tybalt: where Tybalt was to protect the Capulet name and honour, Romeo now avenges Mercutio.

What then, does fanfiction make of Tybalt's cattishness? Half the fanfics of the sample mention Tybalt being cattish, both jokingly and seriously. There are three general approaches I could identify in regards to Tybalt, and they represent the full range of arguments to be made about his cattishness (or lack of it). In some, only Mercutio calls him a cat. Both "An Impeding Storm" and "Wind and Stars" have Mercutio using cat metaphors for Tybalt ("Better watch out, with all that fur you might overheat." (MsScarlettRice)), and in geode's "apartment one-oh-four" Mercutio adopts a cat which he names Tybalt specifically to mock Tybalt, the human. Here we have the plain text

then, with Tybalt's cattishness having less to do with Tybalt than with Mercutio's relationship with Tybalt. The second approach I would identify is mixed: Tybalt is cattish, which is the reason for Mercutio's nickname for him. In a conversation between Benvolio and Escalus in "Supernovas and Fallen Stars," they discuss Tybalt's character. Benvolio says that even though he is "noble, valiant even" he can also "have all the trappings of a cantankerous cat" (Penguin\_Lord). Furthermore, the fanfic makes several allusions to Tybalt moving or behaving feline in particular. In "like fire and powder, which as they kiss consume," after Mercutio teases Tybalt by calling him a "kitten," Tybalt "swipes at [him], cat-like even then" (MercutioLives), proving Mercutio right in trying to disagree. Tybalt's movement becomes cat-like, as do his outbursts of violence. The former especially is reminiscent of A. L. Soens' argument that Tybalt's specific style of fencing, which he identifies as the Spanish style (which is more slashing than the common piercing), is a sign of his feline grace: "When Mercutio complains that Tybalt has 'scratched' him to death [...] he describes a peculiarity of the Spanish thrust [...] as well as playing on Tybalt's feline name" (127). Tybalt's inclination towards fighting is justified though his cattishness: He may have "arrogance and [a] pejorative attitude towards any and all things that displease him," but even this is said with a "touch of humor" (Penguin\_Lord). In Moontwyrine's "Curiosity killed the cat" (the cat in the title ambiguously referring to either Juliet or Tybalt), a fanfic that focuses on the relationship between Mercutio and Tybalt, there is a scene in which Tybalt, Benvolio, Romeo, and Juliet meet in a coffee shop. When Mercutio joins them, he sits down on Tybalt's lap for lack of chair, prompting Tybalt to tell him "'I'm going to kill you.' Tybalt hisses, but his words lacks the usual venom and his arms wrap around Mercutio's waist almost immediately." A cat could not have said it better.

Finally, the last approach is to make a fondness of cats part of Tybalt's personality, rather than make him a cat. This is especially prominent in LeitnerEater's "Mercutio Makes a Discord," a fanfic that is written in the form of a groupchat<sup>12</sup> consisting of a range of characters taken from various Shakespeare plays. Through the fanfic, we learn that Tybalt really likes cats and cat-related media, including *Cats*, the musical. In one chapter, Tybalt has this conversation with Ophelia and user CreeperSlayer (Edmund):

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<sup>12</sup> Discord is a community-specific messaging platform that focuses on groupchats. It is one of the social media platforms that facilitate fandom.

Tybalt: imagine still playing minecraft

CreeperSlayer: at least i didnt pay real money for an animal crossing character

Ophelia: Seriously? You're one of those people? Was it Raymond that you paid for?

Tybalt: leave me alone

The conversation concerns Tybalt having bought a specific character for the video game that he is playing, *Animal Crossing: New Horizons*, which is about a player character going about a relaxed day (gardening, fishing, catching bugs) on a 'cute' customisable island that is also inhabited by 'cute' animal characters. The animal character he paid for is Raymond, an immensely popular cat-character. The joke is, of course, that Tybalt went out of his way to get this extremely popular and rare cat. But interestingly enough, Raymond will "often act in a polite and gentleman-like manner," but at the same time he will also "appear conceited and [...] will stroke [his] ego[] at every chance [he gets], and conversations with [him] reveal just how cool [he thinks he is]" (Hara).<sup>13</sup> Must a cat be an 'unsettling' mirror? If not, then Raymond certainly is a mirror to Tybalt himself. This case is also the most overt example of the way in which fandom plays into the production of the text, with the text itself alluding to several fan practices, the one here being fandom-specific titles on Discord, a platform which itself has become a way of practicing fandom.

These examples, if anything, represent the complexity of Tybalt's cattishness, but also of Tybalt himself. Depending on how the cattishness is used, it can negotiate and resolve some of the contradictions of Tybalt's character while preserving the paradox, as we see in "Curiosity killed the cat." The more cat-like he becomes, the easier it is to integrate the violent side of him into the fanfic while at the same time making him sympathetic. If we can forgive our cats, we can forgive Tybalt too.

### **"Tybalt hates (loves):"<sup>14</sup> Violence, Love and Tybalt Capulet**

The violence that Tybalt engages in within the fanfics, be it verbal or physical (though the latter is more common), takes many different forms and reasons. Some of them I have already shown: His violence sometimes springs from the role he is cast in, at other times it is a sign of his cattish behaviour. Out of all of Tybalt's facets, his violence and / or

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<sup>13</sup> For more information on Raymond, see Hara, Ramon: "Why Raymond Is The Most Popular Animal Crossing: New Horizons Villager" and Hernandez, Patricia: "Raymond is blowing up the Animal Crossing villager black market."

<sup>14</sup> Taken from "By Any Other Name" by grapefruitsnacks.

eagerness to fight appear in 17 of the 20 sample fanfics, making it by far the most common one. In the ones where he is not violent, he is at least unpleasant to deal with.

The way Tybalt's violence is portrayed leads to essentially different readings of his character. From the vain and cruel romantic rival, over the reckless, challenge-seeking boy, to gentle insecurity hidden beneath (many) layers of violence, Tybalt is presented in the full range of his ambiguous possibilities.

When the brunt of his violence comes from his eagerness to engage in fights with others, this is often portrayed as reckless boyishness or played for jokes. The most sombre iteration comes from "Caro," which liberally takes inspiration from Franco Zeffirelli's 1968 adaption, in which "Tybalt's fatal thrust appears accidental and Romeo furiously pursues a soberly retreating Tybalt" (Holmer 359). Thus, "Caro" admits that even though Tybalt swings "his sword with gleeful abandon," he may be "boastful and quarrelsome, but he has little taste for murder" (Pargoletta). Others are more humoristic: In "Mercutio Makes a Discord," in which we only see text messages, Tybalt's anger is made present by him using all caps most of the time, while in "what knife through yonder ribcage breaks!," when Tybalt is asked if he is "DTF" (that is, whether he is "down to" have sex), he instead interprets it as "Down to Fight" and asks whether they have "read [his] Sparknotes character analysis" to have to even ask (LieutenantSaavik). Tybalt's 'violence' here makes him more youthful and focuses his character on liking quarrels or challenges for him to overcome, rather than just being violence for the sake of violence. It plays well into the hero fantasies Capulet accuses him of and adds to him a layer of innocence that makes him seem more alike his age.

Another avenue is when Tybalt lashes out violently when he is hurt, or otherwise hides a gentle heart beneath a cold exterior: In glyphsbowtie's "Rogue," Mercutio notes this: "He was concentrating on Tybalt's dark eyes, eyes which had always been so cruel, eyes which were now glowing gently." When Tybalt lashes out in "By Any Other Name," the reader is given this moment of introspection on Tybalt's part: "It's cruel. Definitely. But Tybalt wants him to feel just a little of the pain Tybalt is feeling. [...] Self-confidence for a heart (or whatever it is that Tybalt has)." In the same fanfic, Paris later notes that "Tybalt only wanted to kill Mercutio as, like, a band-aid" for his own feelings (grapefruitsnacks). This is close to fanfics in which his violence operates as a venue for his repression and troubled masculinity. It must be said that even though some of these fanfics feature Romeo / Juliet as a side pairing, all of them feature a male homosexual pairing as their main romantic couple, in various constellations between Benvolio,

Mercutio, and / or Tybalt, sometimes also Romeo. Given this, there are discussions and crises of homosexuality, identity, and masculinity that feature at the forefront of a character's feelings, and for Tybalt, his struggle often ends in (self-)destructive violence. In some fanfics, among them Penguin\_Lord's "Supernovas and Fallen Stars," glyphsbowtie's "Rogue," MercutioLives's "like fire and powder, which as they kiss consume," and quwinto's "Murder's Not A Hobby For The Cautious," his inclination for violence is channelled into consensual sexuality. Grapefruitsnacks' "By Any Other Name" includes this small fragment that perfectly exemplifies the Tybalt of these fanfics, in which Tybalt makes "intense eye contact that can mean anything from please marry me to I am one step away from murdering you." Other fanfics however, are not so kind. In meltha's "The Madness of Love" Tybalt is more effeminate in his masculinity, but also more cruel. He is "a paragon of beauty and accomplishment," but after a night with Mercutio, the latter observes that "[n]either of them was in love with the other, and in the glaring light of day it was obvious that Tybalt was no friend but only one who had wanted a conquest. " More crass yet is azurish's "Hell is empty (all the devils of Verona)," in which Tybalt is the romantic rival of Mercutio for the love of Benvolio, with Mercutio being all the kinder for Tybalt's cruelty. Benvolio has to realise that "all along, Tybalt had been cannibalizing him, devouring what he wouldn't admit he needed [same-sex attraction] and casting aside the rest ..." Tybalt here does not resolve the issues of his masculinity and homosexuality, but rather fulfils the role of the abusive former partner to make way for a healthier relationship. Regardless of whether this is shown as something positive and consensual, as a coping mechanism that needs to be overcome, or as an expression of abuse, Tybalt becomes a canvas on which sexuality and violence converge. Tyler McNew, in his article "Inside Shakespeare's Monomaniac Closet: Romeo and Tybalt's Homosexual Panic," characterises Tybalt as a "young man in the Capulet household," who "seeks no love but instead lusts after hate and violence" and throughout the play destroys his own identity in attempting to conform to Verona's standards of masculinity (1). This is not dissimilar to what Coppélia Kahn argues in "Coming of Age in Verona," namely that "the feud provides [...] an activity in which [sons] prove themselves men by phallic violence on behalf of their fathers, instead of by courtship and sexual experimentation" and "links sexual intercourse with aggression and violence against women, rather than pleasure and love" (6). While Tybalt is not violent against women, he is violent against others, his lovers, or himself, depending on the fanfic. Similar

to Mercutio, Tybalt lends himself well to homosexual interpretations, but for Tybalt this is because of his unique expression of masculinity and his struggles with it.

A last violence, but a considerably more benign one, comes from his interactions with his family, specifically Juliet. He is protective of her to a fault, and even though this is thematised in seven of the 20 fanfics, nowhere is this more (humorously) apparent than in "By Any Other Name." When confronted with Mercutio and his fake marriage to Juliet, Tybalt reacts as Tybalt would:

Tybalt storms over to Mercutio and says, 'Wow, so funny. Let's get something straight: I hate you, you hate me. In any other circumstance, I'd have my sword out already. But, for some reason, my kid cousin loves you, and I promised not to kill you.' Tybalt grabs Mercutio by the collar and whispers, 'But if I so much as think that you hurt her or are unfaithful, my promise will go out the window and I will kill you.' (grapefruitsnacks)

In a later scene, when Juliet makes clear that Mercutio and Romeo need not worry about her because Tybalt taught her to defend herself, Mercutio remarks that "[o]f course ten-year-old Tybalt wouldn't play hide-and-seek. He'd teach his younger cousin how to wield a fucking sword." Here then, we are back to familial piety, to his love for the Capulets and for Juliet. We see the imagined interactions between the cousins that were left vacant in the play.

The particular expressions of his violence correspond neatly to the various readings of Tybalt I have presented in my close reading, but at the same time, even though they are often close to the text, they also represent contemporary issues and fears. Perhaps exactly because of his ambiguities, Tybalt lends himself well as a safe subject to explore matters of violence, masculinity, and (homo-)sexuality, be it through him or against him.

## Conclusion

Throughout this paper, I have attempted to show the various ways in which Shakespeare fanfiction articulates its arguments about Shakespeare characters through interpretation, subversion, or playing with the Shakespeare text. These arguments are brought forth implicitly in texts that are by all means fictional narratives in their own right, at the same time a primary text and a secondary text. And yet, even though the arguments are articulated uniquely fictionally, correspond to the specific taste or interest of the writer, and are devoid of any academic framework, they still manage to reflect academic

discourses on the subject surprisingly well. I say surprisingly because when I started on this project, my expectation was that most fanfics would articulate arguments specific to fandom discourses and character tropes that respond to the writer / reader rather than the primary text itself. I did not consider that even when that is true, this does not actually oppose a plausible reading of a character. For example, while Tybalt being used as a character to explore repression of sexuality may respond to the writer / reader's present concerns, it was still a choice to use Tybalt specifically, rather than any other character. There appears to be something that is recognisable in Tybalt's struggle with masculinity and that personal recognition is expressed in the fanfic. Jonathan Pope illustrates this sentiment perfectly when he writes that

As scholars, it behooves us to take this issue [Shakespeare fanfiction] seriously because it identifies how many contemporary readers and audiences assess Shakespeare, not just how we want them to assess him: that is, in terms of relatability, the ability—and desire—to see oneself and one's experiences mirrored in the text. (124)

Shakespeare fanfiction offers diverse and contemporary readings of Tybalt's character exactly because it is preceded by a desire for recognition. Pope expressed that fanfiction's most unique quality is how it "insistently situates individual readers and writers, and their individual responses to and interpretations of a text, at the center of a text's meaning" (127) and I would argue that, because of this, we can trace how recognition and analysis work together to articulate arguments that can work, if given a chance to. I hope to have shown that fanfiction may participate in literary analysis in its own way, but many questions about matters of authorship, fandom (co-)creativity, and the intricate relationship between recognition and analysis remain. For now though, I can say that perhaps, through fanfiction, we have come back to the simple, but nonetheless still effective "Ah, that is he."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Aristotle, "Poetics IV."



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