

Love Among Thorns
Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*

Love is as fragile as wildflowers sprouting through the hardened, cracked earth of Ozark mountains—a place where roots run deep (and the clannish, insular world of *Romeo and Juliet*'s families deepens the stakes of their forbidden love). The cabins and wild landscape create a closed, inhospitable environment where tradition and family ties are nearly impossible to escape; however, the characters are trapped in a cycle of generational resentment, as if cursed soil forces them to repeat their family's bitterness. In this dusty, desolate environment, each character fights to grow despite the weeds of hatred that threaten to choke any blooms of love or hope (this is a persistent struggle). *Romeo and Juliet* are like blossoms too bright for this worn land; although they strive to flourish, they remain unable to fully bloom in a world that seeks to cut them down.

Set in the Ozarks of the 1930s, there exists a place of self-sufficiency and close-knit communities where family pride and feuds could thrive in the isolation of the mountains. By setting the story in this environment, the production would gain a visceral, earthy quality, as though the characters are rooted not only in family and tradition but also in the wilderness. Their lives are bound to the land, which holds their ancestors' weight and the grudges passed down through generations. Drawing analogies between the historical feud known as the Slicker War of the Ozarks (between the Turks and Joneses) and the Capulet-Montague feud in *Romeo and Juliet* can deepen the Ozark setting for this adaptation, rooting the story in a similar environment of mistrust, violence, and generational pride.

The Slicker War of the Ozarks began as a conflict over community control and justice, with the "Slickers" acting as vigilantes to enforce their idea of law in an isolated, self-policed environment. The Turk-Jones feud, stemming from this atmosphere of vigilantism, reflects a world where family honor and local justice often supersede formal law. Similarly, the feud between the Capulets and Montagues functions as a form of vigilante justice, with each family taking matters into their own hands, governed by pride and personal grudges rather than a central authority. In the rural Ozarks, limited resources and harsh living conditions created tension among communities. Feuds like that of the Turks and Joneses often stemmed from survival instincts, competition, and the need to assert dominance over scarce resources. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the Capulets and Montagues are wealthy, but in this Ozark adaptation, these families will be reimagined as struggling mountain folk with barely enough land and resources to survive, fueling resentment. This economic strain brings a survivalist edge to the feud as each family struggles to maintain its standing in an unforgiving environment. *Romeo and Juliet*'s love isn't just forbidden because of family pride—it's seen as a threat to family survival, where marrying into the rival family means weakening your clan's future. The Slicker War also highlighted the suspicion of outsiders in isolated communities, where people from other families or towns were often viewed with suspicion and hostility. Similarly, in *Romeo and Juliet*, characters like *Romeo*'s friend Mercutio are caught in the crossfire of the feud, often mistrusted simply for associating with the wrong side. The Ozarks are steeped in folklore, superstition, and a deep respect for family heritage.

Language

This production will be placed in the Ozarks and infused with the pacing and drawl of that community. The Southern drawl naturally aligns with the flow of Shakespeare's verse. Words are stretched, and vowels are lengthened, lending a relaxed, almost musical quality to the language. The slow pacing in tender scenes, like the balcony scene, allows words to linger, giving weight to the romance as if the characters are savoring each syllable in a world that doesn't often grant them beauty. The Southern dialect taps into the weight of history and tradition, reinforcing the idea that these characters are trapped by cycles they inherited. When characters speak with heavy accents, their words echo those who came before them, as if the dialect carries memories of past grievances and lost loves. This grounding in history makes Romeo and Juliet's desire for freedom feel like an attempt to break free from family feuds and the very language and tradition that bind them. In moments of tension, the dialect shifts to a clipped, pointed delivery, with hard consonants and shortened phrases that quicken the pace without sacrificing the dialect's integrity. This shift reflects the urgency and danger beneath the Southern gentility, like a cracked veneer hiding anger and resentment.

Scenic Elements

The Capulets and Montagues occupy neighboring cabins, each nestled in a different part of the woods, barely visible from one another. These rustic, weathered structures have low roofs, stone fireplaces, and uneven wooden floors. The dark cabins and narrow windows reinforce the isolation of these families, their ties to the past, and their mistrust of outsiders. The interior of each cabin reflects the character of each family: one might have hunting trophies and tools hung on the walls, while the other is adorned with heirlooms, emphasizing family pride and tradition.

A creek that winds through the forest and separates the families' land becomes a potent symbol of division and natural beauty. Romeo and Juliet might meet near this creek, its gentle sound lending peace to their stolen moments. The creek symbolizes their desire to cross boundaries and find purity in a world of division, but it also serves as a reminder of the inescapable rift between their families.

The central meeting area—a rocky clearing where locals gather—serves as a space for confrontations and community gatherings. The uneven ground, scattered stones, and patches of hardy grass make this clearing feel both communal and dangerous. When characters fight here, the rocky landscape adds a layer of physicality and rawness, with participants slipping on stones or tripping over roots, reinforcing the harshness of life in the Ozarks.