

SPOTLIGHT



YOLO Juliet by William Shakespeare and Brett Wright

I'm sure there are those who would turn up their noses to such a book as Brett Wright's *YOLO Juliet*. It also might be questioned whether or not a book called *YOLO Juliet*, using texts and emojis to retell Shakespeare's classic *Romeo and Juliet*, was ever meant to be considered serious or high art.

Nonetheless, I'm going to go on record: I loved this and thought it quite clever. Then, I also liked Baz Luhrman's adaptation and wasn't particularly upset that Oxford Dictionary named an emoji as word of the year last year, so you may take my praise with a grain of salt.

One of the best things about Wright's adaptation is the way it captured original the characters but with a 21st century lens. Finally Romeo and Juliet come across as the young and naïve teenagers they are. Whether or not Shakespeare intended them to come across this way is difficult to ascertain. It wasn't as unusual for teens back then to marry. But also, there's something about the dated English that lends his characters more sophistication (to our ears) than they necessarily deserve. Here's where Wright's cleverness comes in. There are a lot of pseudo-swears in the book (OMFG, IDGAF) but many of Shakespeare's innuendoes and barbs are also kept in-tact. Reducing the original words down to their core and keeping the characters' identities in check, the interjections of modern text speak didn't clash as much as you might expect.

Wright also adds his own humour and satire, turning the play into a comedy rather than a tragedy, but let's face it, the tragedy angle's been told to death. I especially liked how Lady Capulet, perhaps showing her age, insisted on signing off on all of her texts, "Love, mom," "Love, LC" and so forth. There are also a couple of autocorrect mishaps that are hilarious.

It doesn't always work. Sometimes having the characters text one another when clearly they're meant to be in the same room takes a bit of belief suspension, but otherwise it's a fun, appropriate adaptation for our times.

Do you think Shakespeare as textspeak is brilliant? Or is it tantamount to heresy? Come weigh in on the value or perils of social media at the Philosophers' Café, January 26th at the library meeting room 6:30 – 8:00 p.m.

Review by John Mutford

Public Services Librarian