

Kevin Tran  
Dr. Warner  
ENGL 112B Section 1  
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*These Violent Delights* By Chloe Gong

**Author Biography**

Chloe Gong is a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, double majoring in English and International Relations. Besides *These Violent Delights*, Chloe has written a sequel titled *Our Violent Ends*, coming out this November, and a spin-off titled, *Four Lady Fortune*, coming out next Fall 2022. She was born in Shanghai, but was raised in New Zealand, and now lives in New York. She started writing at age 13, and *Romeo and Juliet* is one of her favorite plays. On her website you can find a quote stating: “Chloe has been known to mysteriously appear by chanting ‘Romeo and Juliet is one of Shakespeare’s best plays and doesn’t deserve its slander in pop culture’ into a mirror three times.”

<https://thechloegong.com/>

**Summary**

Set in 1920s Shanghai at the height of Western Imperialism, *These Violent Delights*, reimagines Shakespeare’s popular play as a feud between two rival gangs grasping for power in a divided city. Supernatural elements come into play, with a contagious disease causing the infected to literally claw at their throats. As bodies begin to pile up, believed to be spread by a monster, Roma Montagov and Juliette Cai join forces to investigate. Now adults, Roma and Juliette must set aside their childhood grievances to stop this madness before they lose their families and their home.

## Quotes

“Juliette paused, rolling out her ankle to ease the tightness of her shoe. In response, five nearby Scarlet gangsters who were waiting around a restaurant also stilled, waiting to see if they would be summoned. They were killers and extortionists and raging forces of violence, but as the rumors went, Juliette Cai was the girl who had strangled and killed her American lover with a string of pearls. Juliette Cai was the heiress who, on her second day back in Shanghai, had stepped into a brawl between four White Flowers and two Scarlets and killed all four White Flowers with only three bullets. Only one of those rumors were true” (80).

This quote very early on in the novel characterizes Juliette as this very ruthless, dangerous, and scary heir of the Scarlet Gang. She seems like a leader that you would not want to mess with, and being a former Flapper girl, she has this reputation that just surrounds her. Juliette feels much more powerful, in control, and just has more independence and agency in this novel. Juliette likely takes great pride in these rumors, admitting herself only one of them is true, so ultimately it provides her with protection and respect.

“The landing happened in slow motion to Juliette’s eyes, but Roma was already moving. By the time she had registered the horror of what it meant to see two little black specks disappearing into the tufts of white, Roma already had a knife in his hand. By the time she even thought to call out a warning, Roma took the knife and sheared through Lourens’ beard as close as he dared to get to skin, flinging the white hairs to the ground. They waited. The machines had gone to sleep. Now the labs were filled only with heavy breathing. They waited. Two insects surged out from the clump of hair on the ground. Roma stomped down hard, crushing them without mercy. A hundred more insects had been released into the night when they shot through the the crack

underneath the lab door before anyone could stop them, but at least killing two out of the thousands was better than killing none” (285).

This quote is capturing the heat of the investigation as Roma and Juliette discover that insects are taking over the brains of those infected, which is causing the rage within victims. The way Roma was able to kill the insects, shows it is no different from squashing any other bug, but that ultimately whatever being is infesting the city with insects needs to be stopped if this is going to end. The way Roma and Juliette are able to navigate through this investigation, shows how well they work together. This quote is a key expository detail that helps expand the mystery of the plot as to what is causing these insects to appear.

“You cannot *do* this.’ Juliette had started yelling. She had not intended to yell, but she was---four years of silence escaping all at once. ‘Don’t I deserve to know? Don’t I deserve at least a modicum of what the hell was going through your brain when you decided to tell your father exactly how to set an ambush on my---” (...), Instead, the truth was that he had gone against everything he stood for. He had stained his own hands with the lives of dozens of innocents, placed razor blades in his own heart just to keep Juliette alive and safe, far from the threats of his father. He hadn’t used the information he gleaned from his time with her as a tool of power. He had used it as a tool of weakness” (357-361).

Throughout the novel, Juliette holds immense anger towards Roma for the death of several of her Scarlet Gang members in what Juliette believes is an act of betrayal. She fell in love with Roma when they were teenagers and believed him to be different from all the others who were invested in their families’ feud. When Juliette witnessed the ambush and murder of her Scarlet Gang members, she hated and blamed Roma for it believing him to have done it because

he hates her and her family. Roma finally admits to the truth, that he did it to appease his father, because his father wanted him to kill Juliette, and he loved her too much to do it. This long passage demonstrates the type of bond and love the two of them have, and captures the essence of the feuding families Shakespeare developed in his play. This is the first conversation that Roma and Juliette truly have that reflects how they feel and helps them deal with their traumatic past and fall in love yet again.

### **Text Complexity**

ATOS: **6.4**

AR Points **21.0**

Book Level: **Upper grades 9-12**

Dale-Chall Readability Score

Raw score: **3.2397**

Adjusted Score: **(3.6365 + 3.2397)**

Final Score: **6.9**

Grade level: **7-8**

Lexile Text Complexity

**1210L - 1400L**

**Ages 14-18**

**Prepared for College Reading**

Qualitative Text Complexity

The scores indicate that the novel is a bit more complex for younger readers, and places it at a perfect reading level for those in middle school and high school. While the novel does not have the most complex use of language, it is eloquently written at times, and uses varied vocabulary younger readers might struggle with. The text deals with concepts such as imperialism, love, loss, and anger that high schoolers would have the context, education, and

experience to better relate to. While the book is layered with heavy expository dialogue and descriptive imagery, the engaging plot and fantasy elements would keep the young reader engaged in the novel and explore its ideas of imperialism and the duties of children in carrying the legacy of their ancestors.

The novel possesses generalized knowledge on the imperialism efforts of European powers in China, so readers need to understand that complex history to appreciate the setting. This is a historical fiction book, so there are a lot of culturally and historical references to the 1920s settings that would help contextualize to the reader the very vast world Gong has created. Ultimately, the scores superficially are accurate in determining that this novel would best serve a high school audience, however, simply being able to read this book does not indicate a college reading level as some of the language can still be very simplistic at times thus causing the score chart to be varied.

### **Teaching this Novel**

Due to the quantitative and qualitative complexity this novel is determined to be a suitable fit for high school classrooms. This novel may not need to replace Shakespeare, but it can be paired well as a companion novel when teaching a unit on *Romeo and Juliet*. Due to the novel's usage of contemporary English, high school students can better engage in the novel's themes. They can also better understand and appreciate Shakespeare's play by reading this novel. This novel is a reimagining, so it would be best for students to engage in activities like examining the similarities and differences between the play. Students can engage in which characters in this novel are based on the characters in the play. This novel also has concepts of imperialism, the loss of loved ones, and about the feeling of betrayal when you get your heart broken something high schoolers might be able to relate to. Overall, the novel covers a

multilingual and multicultural approach to literature that pays homage to the literary canon while offering students better representation of other cultures and races. This novel could be a fun read, that helps students learn Shakespeare, while giving them a novel that better reflects their diverse identities.

### **Teens Should read this book because...**

Gong very much appreciates Shakespeare as a poet and playwright. Often times the complex and older language of Shakespeare makes it difficult for students to grasp the excellent writing and themes of his play. This novel is a fun and engaging read, that starts off methodically expanding the setting and plot of this novel. Once the novel picks up the pace, the tension is relentless, and the characters compelling enough for readers to understand why so many of the elements of *Romeo and Juliet* have influenced popular culture to this day.

### **Adolescents in the Search for Meaning: Tapping the Powerful Resource of Story**

#### **Chapter 4: Books about Real Life Experiences**

*These Violent Delights*, contain many references to events that occurred during the 1920s. While these details were mostly done to describe the setting of Shanghai and are ultimately not the focal point of the novel, they are still real life historical events that give context to the setting. This novel reinforces the history students will learn in class.

#### **Chapter 5: Books about Facing Death and Loss**

The protagonist Juliette Cai has to overcome her grief over the death of many of her Scarlet Gang members. She feels betrayed by Roma, someone she loves, and has to work

through that anger to reconnect with him. Roma still loves her and also deals with his own personal loss of his mother, so the two ultimately reconcile over what happened in the past and grow as people. It is important for students to learn how important it is to deal with grief and not let loss consume you in unhealthy ways.

## **Chapter 6: Books about Identity, Discrimination, and Struggles with Decisions**

Juliette Cai struggles with confronting Roma over what she feels was a betrayal of her trust. As Chinese women living in Shanghai, she has to deal with the political crises of the time period, while facing discrimination when she lived in America. Both protagonists, Juliette and Roma struggle with the burden of taking on the legacy of their fathers leading their respective gangs for control over Shanghai. They have to decide whether the lives of their families is more important than a longstanding feud as they investigate the contagious disease and wrestle their unresolved feelings for each other. As students read the novel, they understand the pressures that parents place on us, the expectations we must live up to, and the struggles to become a leader as we grow older.

## **Chapter 7: Books about Courage and Survival**

Both protagonists are bravely looking to end the feud between their families and work together to survive this terrible disease that is taking the lives of their families and driving Shanghai into madness. This novel can help students reflect on the importance of working together and how brave that decision is. It also reinforces the courage it takes to investigate harsh diseases to fight for solutions ensuring survival.