Editorial Introduction – Some delights and ends of multilingualism in young adult fiction

This year promises to be a busy one for author Chloe Gong, best known for her Shakespeare-inspired young adult, "historical sci-fi" novels *These Violent Delights* (2020), *Our Violent Ends* (2021), and *Foul Lady Fortune* (2022) ('Chloe Gong'). Two novellas spinning off from her *Romeo and Juliet* retellings have been recently released, *Last Violent Call: A Foul Thing* and *This Foul Murder*, both set among warring gangster families in 1920s Shanghai. Before the year ends, they will be followed by *Foul Heart Huntsman* as well as her debut novel for adult readers, *Immortal Longings* (both forthcoming 2023). Billed as *Antony and Cleopatra* meets *Hunger Games,* the latter is the first instalment in her series Flesh and False Gods. *Women and Shakespeare* podcast host Varsha Panjwani described Gong, in her introduction to an episode dedicated to the novelist, as a "a young and minority woman author" who was born in Shanghai, grew up in New Zealand, and went to university in the United States ('Chloe Gong'). This smorgasbord of culture-crossing resembles that of Gong's heroine Juliette Cai. Gong has spoken of the way in which her life experiences inform her treatment of diaspora, colonialism, cultural imperialism, identity, and their relationship to canonical literature in her works in interview ('Chloe Gong').

I first read Gong's work at a time when I was organising research seminars for undergraduate students on literary translation in schools and resistance to Englishisation in education, led respectively by Clémentine Beauvais (herself an author and translator) and Ursula Lanvers. Around that time, I was engaging with historic and contemporary practices of Shakespeare in translation in East Asia and planning undergraduate modules on Shakespeare and YA literature ready for a year's teaching at Kobe College, a Japanese university. I was fascinated by Gong's use of languages other than English in her dominantly Anglophone work. I was intrigued by the code-switching cool of her characters; characters young people might identify with and wish to emulate. My interest was further piqued by the way in which her non-English usages are sometimes translated into English, sometimes not. I pondered the potential of her books to excite young Anglophones about the learning and use of other languages, in a context of the decline of language education in the UK and comparable Anglophone countries, which intersects with the global trend towards Englishisation (I share evidence of this later). I discuss some examples of Gong's use of languages other than English from *These Violent Delights* and *Our Violent Ends* in detail in subsequent paragraphs, but they will make more sense to the uninitiated if I first give some details of Gong's adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Gong describes 1920s Shanghai as a "melting pot of native Chinese and then immigrants who were fleeing. There were Russians and then Jews and then all the persecuted peoples in Europe. And then there were colonists and imperialists coming in to persecute people" ('Chloe Gong'). Her Capulets are the Chinese Cai family; her Montagues are White Russian émigrés, the Montagovs. Her Mercutio, Marshall Seo, claims Korean as well as Chinese heritage. These main characters are multilingual, several of them European educated, easily able to understand and converse in the English and French of the international settlements, rapidly and frequently codeswitching between these languages as well as multiple Chinese dialects such as Shanghainese. Gong exploits and emphasises "the mutual incomprehensibility of diverse branches of Chinese" (Steiner 32). She adds smatterings of Italian, Dutch and Latin to her characters thoughts and speech, denoting the speakers' international mobility and European cultural capital, as well as Japanese, hinting at Japan's burgeoning imperial project at the time. All of this is represented in the texts in

roman alphabet, with diacritical marks where necessary. Italics are only sometimes used in the tradition of flagging the non-English words in Anglophone texts.

There is a stereotype of Anglophone audiences as stubbornly monolingual, even linguaphobic and xenophobic, refusing to engage with cultural products that require subtitling. Gong's work however implies a rather more versatile Anglophone readership: one that enjoys the spice of mixing foreign language phrases into English and 'the products of the world' more generally (Knowles 55); that is globalised in terms of being conscious of and interested in others (Rebellato 4); that to an extent resists cultural and linguistic homogeneity, instead celebrating fluid interchange in communication and culture (Rebellato 6, Knowles 2, 26). I identified twenty passages featuring a language other than English in *These Violent Delights*, and forty-seven in *Our Violent Ends* – more than double the number in the first book. This might suggest that Gong, and her publishers, leaned further into multilingualism in the sequel, having tested the market with the successful first book.

The non-English phrases are variously untranslated and explicitly or implicitly translated. Examples of "untranslated" Chinese run like this: "The staff say what we want them to say, qīn'ài de" Lady Cai said. She made a flicking motion with her fingers at Juliette" (2020, 62). Lady Cai's term of endearment, equivalent to "my dear", "dearest" or "darling", is neither translated nor explained by the context. Examples of explicit translation also need little glossing. A characteristic example involving Chinese to English translation is: "'Guài. Guài. Guài.' *Guài?* Head spinning, Juliette ran through every word that resembled what the man was chanting. The only one that made sense was— '*Monster?*' she asked him, gripping his shoulder. 'Is that what you mean to say?'" (2020, 24). Implicit translation occurs where Gong includes some contextual information that helps Anglophone readers gather the meaning of words and phrases more indirectly: "Most girls in the burlesque club—dancer or patron alike—were dressed as Rosalind was: in the fashionable qipao sweeping through Shanghai like a wildfire. With the outrageous slit down the side revealing ankle to thigh and the high collar acting like a choke hold, the design was a blend of Western flamboyance with Eastern roots, and in a city of divided worlds, the women were walking metaphors" (2020, 9). Here, the mandarin Chinese word "qipao" is used without an English translation, but readers unfamiliar with the term can gather from Gong's description that it is a kind of dress. Across the two books, most usages of non-English words go untranslated – fewer, if unique usages are considered, since some terms recur frequently like proper nouns that describe a family member's role e.g. "mèimei", little sister. About half as many non-English words are translated, roughly a quarter each, explicitly and implicitly.

The text contains similar and recurrent examples expressing employer/employee relations and occupations ("shàoyé" meaning "Master"; "Xiǎojiě" akin to "Miss"). There are also endearments in Chinese and Russian equating to "my dear", "qīn'ài de" and "(moya) dorogaya", used between lovers as well as parents to children in the books, in ways that vary from sincere to sarcastic. On the flip side, there are put-downs, mainly used by the young protagonists: "mudak", used like "idiot", is favoured by Roma; "Tā mā de", meaning literally "his mother" but used as an expression for extreme emotion, such as anger or surprise, much like "damn" or "fuck". The presence of these curse words (and there are a range of others, including in French) is interesting since they have multiple possible functions that are slightly in tension. They might obscure swear words for young adult readers (or, perhaps, more accurately their parents, guardians and educators), as they are rarely glossed – though their intention or effect may give away the gist of their meaning. Or they might provoke young adult readers to research these cryptic words and phrases.

Evidence that romance, sex, and cusses increase young people's intrinsic motivation for language learning ranges from the popularity of Shakespeare Insults games and apps in the 2010s to Korean undergraduates wanting to improve their English for internationalised internet dating (Olive). That this kind of puzzling over the meaning of words by a reader, from a language not understood by them, benefits their knowledge about language, interculturalism, and critical faculties more generally, is well recognised. George Steiner wrote decades ago that "A study of translation is a study of language" (49) and "Mediate thought about language is an attempt to step outside one's own skin of consciousness" (115).

The characters' proper names have been adapted from their Shakespearean equivalents in various ways. Father Lawrence becomes a Dutch scientist, known by his first name Lourens. Rosalind becomes Lang Selin, using the family name first, then given name, order common in several Asian countries. In a twist that deftly complicates notions of European original and Asian derivative and unilateral flows of influence, however, she is known by the novels' cosmopolitan characters as Rosalind Lang. Benvolio and Romeo are Russified as Benedikt and Roman or, more frequently, its diminutive Roma. Russian gendered, patronymic naming practices are maintained, so that Roma Montagov's sister is Alisa Montagova. The characters' names demonstrate not only that the novels engage in both the related practices of adaptation and translation, but also give implicit instruction to readers about the heterogeneity of naming practices. They offer readers diverse models of and possibilities for naming. As Steiner writes about the relationship between, and value of, linguistic plurality and diverse worldviews: "Each different tongue offers its own denial of determinism. The world it says can be other" (246).

Verbs rarely appear, except in imperative phrases ranging from curses – like the French "va te faire foutre", "go fuck yourself" (2020, 117) – to more literal commands: "'Hajima!' [Stop!] Juliette snapped, pushing him back inside" (2021, 98). Nouns dominate the inclusion of languages other than English in the novels. A further example of this is the use of words to describe food and drink, as well as the shops or stands that sell them: xiǎolóngbāo or just bāo (increasingly used in English), steamed dumplings; húntún, another dumpling (more commonly referred to as wonton in English); huángjiǔ, a Chinese grain-based wine (one type of it, Shaoxing wine might be familiar to keen cooks of world cuisine, but perhaps not to many Anglophone young adult readers). The use of Chinese culinary vocabulary could indicate the untranslatability of culinary terms; relative hospitality towards food-related loan words in English; globalisation of Asian food; sating of hunger for vicarious travel to other countries, cultures and cuisines through literature during the global Coronavirus pandemic, when these books were published; or multiple of these. Whatever the explanation, their use contributes to deliciously capturing the sights, sounds, smells and tastes of Shanghai's streets for Anglophone readers, regardless of whether or not they have travelled to China or global Chinatowns: "They passed the cream sellers and the puppet shows, then walked by the whole row of xiǎolóngbāo stores without once pausing to inhale the steam that smelled like delicious meats" (2020, 367). Gong herself conceptualises such localised aspects of her work as part of her "world building" ('Chloe Gong').

Additionally, the use of these gastronomic terms connoting the strong and delicious savour of the foods they encapsulate could counter, for readers, internationally widespread, negative associations between Chinese markets and the earliest identified outbreaks of Coronavirus. More generally, using Chinese culinary vocabulary offers an example of the authorial labour Gong undertakes to share her enjoyment of Chinese language and culture,

handed down to her from her parents, and other Shanghainese relatives, to Anglophone audiences: “I do think the way that I was raised and the way that I see the world” (‘Chloe Gong’). Although the examples of food-related non-English words that I found were all Chinese, as with the discussion of Gong’s use of proper nouns above, they offer potential for readers’ linguistic and cultural education, implicit and explicit. Sayings play a similar role, including Chinese proverbs such as “Huò bù dān xíng”, roughly translated by Juliette’s character as “Misfortunes tend to come all at once,” (2020 24-25). This example might find readers reflecting on the cross-cultural nature of some aphorisms, as well as adaptation, since this scene in her book alludes to Claudius’ remark on the successive deaths of Polonius and Ophelia in *Hamlet*: “When sorrows come, they come not single spies,/ But in battalions” (IV.v).

Old adages include some of the languages more sparingly used in the books: for instance, “lex tallionis”, a Latin rendering of the biblical principal “an eye for an eye” that neatly reinforces the books’ revenge theme, growing out of the play’s original feuding families (2020 70). Non-Christian customs and their associated vocabularies all play a similar role, with varying degrees of explicit didacticism. Observant behaviour at temples is taught to readers through an instance where Juliette relays the women in her family visiting a temple: “Her mother waved her hand at the far wall, where a smattering of women knelt in front of symbolic deities. They would kētóu three times, foreheads briefly touching the floor mats, then plant their incense into the shrines” (2021, 233). Readers might make the association between the Chinese term for a bowing movement to its Anglicisation ‘kow-tow’. On a more transactional level, the texts feature snippets of mundane conversation beyond English, including greetings (asking in French “Ça va?”, “How’s things?” 2020, 310).

Gong’s books might be cited as an example of intercultural texts that are designed to “produce the experience of difference” for consumers (Knowles 31). Gong herself describes such an experience in her own growing-up: “I've always had this, oh, this is my cultural history. But oh, this is the place that I am growing up, and then I have to find some sort of place within. And then there's that feeling of, oh, wow, juggling two worlds” (‘Chloe Gong’). She describes writing these texts in terms of addressing this experience for herself and others who can, or want to, relate to it: “Why is there no media that really hones in on that? … there haven't been as many creators as there could be putting products out there. … I just sat down. I was like, I could do something about that” (‘Chloe Gong’). While Gong’s use of the word “products” suggests her awareness of, and her appeal to, the globalised market for goods (economic globalisation along capitalist lines), the sense of purpose she describes might also represent a “kind of cosmopolitanism-from-below that is perhaps more palatable for many than the pieties of state multiculturalism” (Ric Knowles 68, 57). Her use of multiple languages throughout these books certainly challenges the stereotype of the linguaphobic or linguistically inept English reader (the latter somewhat justified in my national context by evidence that “language competencies developed through school learning in the United Kingdom and Ireland are the poorest of all EU countries” and reinforced in the public media (Lanvers 2017, 517, 523).

Gong’s multilingual texts suggest, attract, and help to create, young readers with a high degree of “cultural cosmopolitanism…consist[ing] of an attitudinal openness to cultural difference combined with a practise of navigating across cultural boundaries” (Knowles 58). Its young heroines and heroes model for readers a multilingualism that is powerful and alluring, enabling them to overpower their adversaries, win romantic partners, and lead their communities through the acquisition and dissemination knowledge across a range of

languages and nationalities, or sometimes just fool their relatives by trumping their language skills. Examples of each of these empowering uses of their polyglot skills are shown below:

> [Lord Cai speaking to Juliette] "…we still need allies. We need power, we need customers, and we need their support. And I need you to be my little translator when they mutter among themselves in French, thinking I cannot understand them." (2020 116).

> Juliette thought fast. They could salvage this. This wasn't beyond saving. "Good morning. We're from the university," she exclaimed, dropping into another dialect—Wenzhounese—so promptly that Roma jolted back the smallest inch, unable to conceal his astonishment at her quick switch (2020, 227).

> "Speak plainly," Lady Cai said. She, too, slipped into accented English. "You mean to say that putting aside the blood feud with the White Flowers is more acceptable than the risk of foreigners ruling us." "Why can't they just speak běndì huà? [the local dialect]" an aunt muttered bitterly in complaint, no longer able to track the conversation (2020 182-183).

In the context of global English, where many Anglophones believe "English is enough" and overstate its global significance, the learning of modern languages in Anglophone countries faces increasing challenges (Lanvers 2017, 2018). These include the United Kingdom, Australia, as well as countries in which Gong has lived, learnt and worked: New Zealand and the United States. Students' rationales about whether to continue with language learning have been found to relate to their experience and understanding of the social, cultural and symbolic capital of modern languages (Coffey 2016). Gong's works show these capitals in action and may help awaken her readers to them. Stakeholders – educators, parents, librarians – could introduce students to her texts with this end in mind, not to mention the aim of fighting a stigmatised view of modern language learning more generally. Europe-wide comparative studies reveal that British students show the lowest motivation for language learning among their peers (Eurostat 2012). That their perception of the cultural capital entailed in modern language learning is a stronger motivator for learners than other reasons, resulting in a greater likelihood of them continuing their language studies has been demonstrated in existing research (Lanvers 2017, 528).

Gong's texts chime with the prominent rationales for learning modern languages of economic utility and benefit to individual employability. The characters' financially profitable (though often illicit) business ventures depend on communication across linguistic boundaries, and the protagonists' language skills ensure them central roles in their families' empires. Meanwhile, "other rationales, such as personal enrichment, fostering societal cohesion, developing intercultural understanding and tolerance, and world citizenship", described in existing research as neglected, are arguably made even more compelling than utilitarian reasons in Gong's books, as the characters tentatively strike up romantic relationships, collegialities, and friendships across linguistic and cultural divides, that promise to arrest the two warring families' feud (McNeill, Spöring, and Hartley, 2004).

The pages drip with beguiling characters who demonstrate what applied linguists have called "international posture", "a tendency to relate oneself to an international

community" rather than individual linguistic or cultural groups (Yashima 2009, 145). I could equally invoke the aforementioned cosmopolitanism or "world citizenship" (an ancient concept dating back to Diogenes) as related terms to describe this phenomenon. The characters are an antidote to popular preconceptions of modern languages as "irrelevant", "difficult", "nerdy", "boring", and "pointless", which have been associated with these subjects' sometime unpopularity at schools and universities in predominantly monolingual, Anglophone countries (Lanvers 2018). Bartram found that peer perceptions of a subject can influence subject choice and enjoyment, including modern languages. It is interesting to consider whether fictional characters like Gong's, with whom young readers empathise, or who they wish to emulate, might have a similar effect. The linguistic abilities of Gong's characters', in both European and Asian languages, resonates with the reported interest of young people in Anglophone countries in having a wider choice of world languages to study in formal education (Bartram 2006).

Gong's lead characters have all received excellent educations, though since these have often been exclusive – undertaken in English or French at leading, private institutions internationally – Gong's texts reinforce, rather than challenge, the social divide in language learning that Lanvers' work has demonstrated in the UK. This may pose a barrier for readers to seeing these characters' experiences, knowledge and skills as attainable. Recent research suggests it is less likely to be the case that students who do not value language learning but rather education policy, school leaderships and, to an extent, schoolteachers, arguing that the issues are systemic rather than learner characteristics (Lanvers 2018, 129). A widespread, monolingual, Anglophone outlook, prevalent socially and politically – especially in an age of the resurgence of populist and nationalist politics in countries like the US and the UK – has also been cited as a reason for low levels of language learning (Lanvers 2018). So, while Chloe Gong's multilingual protagonists offer language learning inspiration for young readers, and celebrate polyglot identities and international outlooks, it may be their teachers and politicians with the most to learn from these texts' handling of language and act on in terms of making language learning broadly accessible.

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The articles in this issue begin with Luis Tosina Fernandez's attention to language in young adult fiction, specifically the use of proverbs in J.L. Barnes's *The Inheritance Games.* The piece explores the way the young heroine's engagement with these sayings challenges common conceptions of them as the preserve of older generations. Darren Paterson's article considers atemporal figurations of childhood in literature, specifically Michael Ende's *Momo* and Charlie Mackesy's *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse*, which present readers with non-linear conceptualisations of time and development. His piece offers the idea of "growing out" as an alternative to notions of "growing up". Sophia Mehrbrey invites us to reconsider representations of the child dancer and actress Maddie Ziegler in the reality television show *Dance Moms* and, subsequently, in adult singer Sia's music videos. Mehrbrey argues that, skipping over the rich possibilities of teenage rebelliousness, images of the angelic child and serious adult are instead prized. This is something echoed in the power dynamics and processes of making the work in which Ziegler stars. Like Paterson, Mehrbrey is concerned with atemporality in representations of childhood. Conversely, Javier Samper Vendrell's article is concerned with a childhood-focused text that is very

definitely temporally specific: Taika Waititi's Academy Award-nominated film *Jojo Rabbit*. Based on the book *Caging Skies* by Christine Leunens, this film departs from the usual focus on children persecuted, or otherwise adversely affected, by the Third Reich and other Axis powers (*The Diary of Anne Frank, Sophie's Choice, Life is Beautiful, Empire of the Sun*, to pick a handful from my own childhood). Instead, it controversially portrays a child's idolising relationship with the Hitler Youth movement, exploring the film's implicit question of "How could this happen?" through Waititi's hallmark "child's outlook". The concluding article is by Rocio Ordosgoitia-Lopez, Diana Giraldo-Cadavid, Diana Aristizabal-Garcia, and Andrea Lafaurie. It moves us from a historic, fictional(ised), European child's outlook to those of contemporary South American children, through their exploration of Colombian children's perceptions of their uses of, and feelings about, multiple types of social media across various devices. The book reviews in this issue feature critical and creative texts, in French and in English, concerning the work of L.M. Montgomery; picturebooks, comics and graphic modes; YA murder mysteries; neatly rounding off with Mickaël Brun-Arnaud and Sanoe's picturebooks exploring woodland creatures's memory, memorialising and ecopedagogy in children's literature.

After an open recruitment process in late 2022/early 2023, we welcome to our editorial team Élodie Malanda, from Tilburg University, in the Netherlands, and Emma-Louise Silva, University of Antwerp, Belgium. Élodie's research focuses on children's and YA literature in postcolonial contexts, including Black French and Black German children's and YA literature and literary activism. Her book about the pitfalls of good intentions in children's and YA novels about Africa, *L'Afrique dans les romans pour la jeunesse en France et en Allemagne, 1991–2010* was published with Honoré Champion in 2019. Emma-Louise is currently working on the "Constructing Age for Young Readers" project, funded by the European Research Council. Her research merges age studies, cognitive narratology, genetic criticism, and philosophy of mind to explore children's literature, YA fiction, and media for the young. Their skills and interests consolidate the journal's existing ones, as well as extending them into new, complementary fields.

Dr Sarah Olive is a Senior Lecturer and Director of Research in the School of Educational Sciences, Bangor University, UK. She is the lead author of *Shakespeare in East Asian Education* (Palgrave, 2021), the author of *Shakespeare Valued* (Intellect, 2015) and the guest editor of a forthcoming issue of the peer-reviewed international journal *Cahiers Élisabéthains* on 'Hot Shakespeare, Cool Japan' (2023). She publishes chapters and articles at the intersections of Shakespeare; young adult literature; and education.

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