

The Shadow of the Wind

by Carlos Ruiz Zafón

About the Book

Barcelona, 1945: A city slowly heals from its war wounds, and Daniel, an antiquarian book dealer's son who mourns the loss of his mother, finds solace in a mysterious book entitled *The Shadow of the Wind*, by one Julián Carax. But when he sets out to find the author's other works, he makes a shocking discovery: someone has been systematically destroying every copy of every book Carax has written. In fact, Daniel may have the last of Carax's books in existence. Soon Daniel's seemingly innocent quest opens a door into one of Barcelona's darkest secrets — an epic story of murder, madness, and doomed love.

Praise for the Book

“Anyone who enjoys novels that are scary, erotic, tragic, and thrilling should rush right out to the nearest bookstore and pick up *The Shadow of the Wind*. Really, you should.”

— **Michael Dirda**,
The Washington Post

“If you thought the true gothic novel died with the 19th century, this will change your mind. [*The Shadow of the Wind*] is the real deal, a novel full of cheesy splendor and creaking trapdoors, a novel where even the subplots have subplots. . . . This is one gorgeous read.”

— **Stephen King**

“[T]here is no question that *Wind* is wondrous. . . . [M]asterful, meticulous plotting and extraordinary control over language. . . . *The Shadow of the Wind* is ultimately a love letter to literature, intended for readers as passionate about storytelling as its young hero.”

— **Entertainment Weekly, Editor's Choice**

“Gabriel García Márquez meets Umberto Eco meets Jorge Luis Borges for a sprawling magic show.”

— **Richard Eder**,
The New York Times Book Review

Courtesy of Penguin Group

About the Author

Carlos Ruiz Zafón

American Novelist (1964–)

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WRITINGS

- *La sombra del viento*, Planeta (Barcelona, Spain), 2001, translation by Lucia Graves; published as *The Shadow of the Wind*, Penguin Press (New York, NY), 2004.

Also author of four books for young adults.

Sidelights

Born and raised in Barcelona, Spain, author Carlos Ruiz Zafón lives and works in Los Angeles, California, where he moved in his late twenties to work as a screenwriter. His first novel, *The Shadow of the Wind*, is the result of a decision to write a book set in his homeland. Although Ruiz Zafón reads extensively in English and has a particular affection for nineteenth-century English-language novelists, he wrote *The Shadow of the Wind* in Spanish. The book was first published in Spain, where it spent months on the best-seller lists, promoted primarily by word of mouth through the enthusiasm of booksellers.

Set in Barcelona in 1945, *The Shadow of the Wind* tells the story of a young boy named Daniel whose father, an antiquarian book dealer, takes him to a rare book depository, where he is allowed to choose one book to preserve. Daniel becomes obsessed with the life of his book's author, Julian Carax, and his investigation into Carax's life and death leads him on a journey of dangerous twists and turns. In a review for the *Chicago Tribune*, Sandy Bauers remarked that "this novel has it all: seduction, danger, revenge, and a mystery that the author teases out with mastery. Zafón has outdone even the mighty Charles Dickens." *New York Times Book Review* contributor Richard Eder remarked that Ruiz Zafón's work resembles a situation in which "Gabriel García Márquez meets Umberto Eco meets Jorge Luis Borges for a sprawling magic show, exasperatingly tricky and mostly wonderful." A reviewer for *Publishers Weekly* stated that the author's reading habits affect the book negatively in that "the colorful cast of characters, the gothic turns and the straining for effect only give the book the feel of para-literature or the Hollywood version of a great nineteenth-century novel." Other critics praised the author's lush,

detailed style, Michael Dirda remarking in the *Washington Post* that “anyone who enjoys novels that are scary, erotic, touching, tragic, and thrilling should rush right out to the nearest bookstore and pick up *The Shadow of the Wind*.”

FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR

PERIODICALS

- *Booklist*, March 1, 2004, Keir Graff, review of *The Shadow of the Wind*, p. 102.
- *Bookseller*, January 2, 2004, Benedicte Page, “Barcelona Gothic: Carlos Ruiz Zafón Has Become a Spanish Literary Sensation after the Release of His First Book for Adults,” p. 24.
- *Chicago Tribune*, May 20, 2004, Sandy Bauers, “‘Shadow’ Reveals a Novel Idea for a Novel,” p. 7.
- *Economist*, April 3, 2004, “Come the Catalan,” p. 96.
- *Entertainment Weekly*, April 16, 2004, Rebecca Ascher-Walsh, review of *The Shadow of the Wind*, p. 81.
- *Kirkus Reviews*, March 1, 2004, review of *The Shadow of the Wind*, p. 200.
- *Library Journal*, February 1, 2004, Lawrence Olszewski, review of *The Shadow of the Wind*, p. 126.
- *New York Times Book Review*, April 25, 2004, Richard Eder, “In the Cemetery of Forgotten Books,” p. 6.
- *Publishers Weekly*, September 23, 2002, John F. Baker, “Short Takes,” p. 13; February 16, 2004, review of *The Shadow of the Wind*, p. 148.
- *Washington Post*, April 25, 2004, Michael Dirda, “The Boy’s Obsession with the Work of an Obscure Author Leads to Mysteries within Mysteries,” p. T15.

ONLINE

- *Lyrik and Prosa Web site*, <http://www.lyrikwelt.de/> (July 26, 2004), “Zafón, Carlos Ruiz.”

Source: *Contemporary Authors Online*, Thomson Gale, 2006

Source Database: Contemporary Authors Online

Author Interview

Q: *The Shadow of the Wind* takes place in the atmospheric, and very palpable, setting of Barcelona — and in fact, this city becomes one of the novel’s more prominent characters. Why did you choose to locate your story here?

Carlos Ruiz Zafón: Barcelona is a complex virtual world of Dickensian lights and shadows, beautiful and mysterious. I wanted to bring its history, its soul, alive in this story in a very cinematic, sensorial way. A poet once called Barcelona “the great enchantress.” I was born, raised, and have lived most of my life here and wanted to use my hometown not merely as a backdrop, but as an organic character — to convey its romantic and seductive, yet sometimes dark and dangerous allure.

Q: You chose post-Spanish civil war Barcelona rather than the contemporary city. Why is that?

CRZ: The first half of the 20th century was a time of tremendous dramatic and historic significance, not just for Barcelona or Spain, but the entire world. I wanted to use this rich, complex historical canvas to explore themes and issues that are as, or even more, relevant today than they were then.

Q: You’re a screenwriter as well as a novelist. How has that influenced your fiction?

CRZ: Writing screenplays forces you to consider elements of story structure, and a variety of narrative devices, that can be adapted to the more complex demands of a novel. I believe the modern novel should try to capture the scope and ambition of the 19th century classics while making use of the narrative tools the 20th century has left us, from the avant-garde to the images and sounds of the golden screen.

I also think that this book, being a novel of novels and a book within a book, has the reader bring his own literary and cultural references — from classic Greek tragedy to genre fiction to the classics to the language and images of modern advertising or film — and project them into the story. All of these things come together within the texture of the novel and, I hope, will allow each reader discover something of himself in the stories within stories — their hopes and fears, their own humanity mirrored. I think the reader will enjoy the ride, the images, the language, the humor, the suspense, the sense of adventure, and above all the thrill of pure storytelling.

Q: Where did the ideas for *The Cemetery of Forgotten Books* come from?

CRZ: This formidable labyrinth of books was the first image that came to my mind for this novel, the first brick in the building. It's a metaphor of all the vital and important things, ideas, and people we tend to forget or neglect in favor of the banal, empty, and often self-destructive elements in our lives.

Why books? I'm a voracious reader, and I like to explore all sorts of writing without paying attention to labels, conventions, or critical fads. I learn a little from everything I read, from genre fiction to the classics, though if I had to choose a particular pantheon I'd say the great 19th century giants have yet to be beat or even remotely approached. Dickens, Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky, Balzac, Hugo, Hardy, Dumas, Flaubert & Co. Dream Team indeed. *The Shadow of the Wind* uses elements of the mystery novel, the historical thriller, the grammar of film and image storytelling, metafiction, romance saga, gothic literature, the comedy of manners, and many other narrative devices to create a new genre that goes beyond the sum of its parts. My aim was to allow the reader to experience this world and these characters in a sensory, cinematic, tactile way.

Q: This book has become quite an international phenomenon — still at the top of Spain's bestseller list, where it was first published in Spanish, and #1 in Germany. Clearly it crosses cultural and national boundaries. Who do you see as the ideal reader for this novel?

CRZ: I hope this is reading for those who love, really love, to read. I drew on the Dickensian model of creating a complex world populated by intriguing places, peculiar creatures, and infinite details at work. A good novel begins with a universe that should feel to the reader as real and fascinating, if not more so, than the one he inhabited before he picked up the book. This is a novel for those who love to lose themselves in that kind of universe.

Every translation needs some fine-tuning to adapt certain aspects of the context and double meanings. However, I tend to think readers, and lovers of books in general, have a secret nation of their own, and their understanding and intellectual curiosity goes beyond languages, passports, or even the fine points of slightly different cultural and historical contexts.

Q: This is your sixth novel, and it has been sold in twenty countries and translated into several languages. What do you think accounts for its worldwide appeal? Do you find that readers here in the States respond differently from Spanish readers?

CRZ: I think it is all about the story, the characters, the pleasure of the language and of the imagination, the experience of the read. American readers respond to *The Shadow of the Wind* in the very same way as Italian, Spanish, Norwegian, Australian, French, British, or German readers do. The pleasure of reading a great story and to experience the characters' adventures is universal

Q: Daniel promises to show Bea a Barcelona that she's never seen. From the paintings of Joan Miro to the imaginative architecture of Antoni Gaudí, what is it about Barcelona that lends itself to fantasy? Do you believe, as Daniel says to Bea, that “the memory of this city will pursue you and you'll die of sadness”?

CRZ: Barcelona provides an enchanting, mysterious, and romantic setting for the story because many things about the place, its streets, its history, and its people are unique. It is also my hometown, a place I know like the palm of my hand, and I wanted to use this fantastic backdrop as an organic character, very much like the great novelists of the nineteenth century did in creating the London of Dickens, the Paris of Victor Hugo and Balzac, etc. Hopefully, after reading the novel the memory of Barcelona and the joy of the story will pursue the readers as well.

Q: Daniel says, “Once, in my father’s bookshop, I heard a regular customer say that few things leave a deeper mark on a reader than the first book that finds its way into his heart” (p. 8). What book was that for you? Are there any forgotten books you would like to rescue from obscurity?

CRZ: I would say than rather than just one book, for me what did the trick was the world of storytelling, of language, of ideas. All books, all stories, all words and ideas, all the possibilities of the mind — such an infinite universe of wonders is what did me in and I haven't looked back. And I would like to save all books, those that are banned, those that are burned, or forgotten with contempt by the mandarins who want to tell us what is good and what is bad. Every book has a soul, as Daniel's father says, and I believe every book is worth saving from either bigotry or oblivion.

Q: Your work has been compared to Charles Dickens, Victor Hugo, and Umberto Eco. Comparisons could also be drawn between *Shadow* and the works of filmmaker Pedro Almodovar — the overt sexuality, the parents’ sins visited on the children, the prismatic storytelling. Do you agree with any of these comparisons? Who, if anyone, do you consider your biggest influence?

CRZ: I think many direct and indirect influences go into each author’s work. In my case I believe I incorporate many elements from many different traditions of storytelling, from the Victorian novelists to the metafictional literary games that remind some readers of *The Name of the Rose*, as well as other techniques that come from a cinematic approach. My ambition is to blend all of those storytelling tools to provide the reader with a more intense, more engaging, and ultimately deeper reading experience. The wider the author’s arsenal of tools and the better technically equipped the storyteller is, the better the tale will be. I believe the craft is the most important element in any artist’s work, and I try to learn from everything, to incorporate and develop as many techniques as I can into my own voice. I don’t ask for credentials or classic status: from Dickens to Orson Welles, from Gothic fiction to Japanese anime. If it works, I’m in.

Q: This book is obviously an ode to books and to the art of reading. You have Bea state that “the art of reading is slowly dying, that it’s an intimate ritual, that a book is a mirror that only offers us what we already carry inside us, that when we read, we do it with all our heart and mind, and great readers are becoming more scarce by the day” (p. 484). Do you believe this to be true? Do you share Fermín’s disdain for television?

CRZ: I believe it is in our hands. Now more than ever, I believe it is up to us to decide if we want to think by ourselves, or if we want to accept and submit to what others would rather have us believe. As for TV, well, I share many of Fermín’s views. I’d say TV is a very powerful medium, which can be used, and sometimes it is used, to accomplish great things. Unfortunately, those are exceptions to the rule. But blaming TV as an abstract entity is nonsensical. It’s our hand on the remote. There’s a world out there outside the tube. Life’s short: Wake up and live.

Q: The Aldaya Mansion, the allegedly cursed Angel of the Mist, seems to be a character in its own right. It has a life of its own, creaking, moaning, and breathing fire in its belly. Where did you draw your inspiration for your novel's gothic centerpiece? Are you attracted to haunted houses, the supernatural, and other horror story trappings? Do you believe in curses?

CRZ: I don't believe in the supernatural, but I think it provides excellent material for literary purposes. Ghost stories are great tools to explore symbolic and atavistic elements in a narrative. Shakespeare, Dickens, and Henry James used ghosts and phantasmagoric trappings in order to add layers of meaning and effectiveness to their stories. At the end of the day, it is all fiction, poetry, and magic. Real curses, however, don't dwell in dark basements but in our hearts and conscience. We make our own moral choices, sometimes far spookier than any horror tale, and the terrors of this world are far too real and ordinary.

Q: There are many casualties of love in your novel, not just the star-crossed love between Julián and Penélope, but also the love that makes Miquel Moliner and Nuria Monfort both lay down their lives for Julián. Why do you think we are fascinated with ill-fated tragedies of love?

CRZ: Because that's the stuff that thing called life is made of. Love, deception, tragedy, joy, passion, murder, jealousy, lust, fear, generosity, friendship, betrayal . . . Human nature provides the lyrics, and we novelists just compose the music.

Q: Fermín once says of the cinema, "Between you and me, this business of the seventh art leaves me cold. As far as I can see, it's only a way of fueling the mindless and making them even more stupid. Worse than football or bullfights. The cinema began as an invention for entertaining the illiterate masses. Fifty years on it's much the same." Yet your narrative is cinematic in scope, its images lifelike and grand. You are also a screenwriter. Would you like to see your novel become a movie? If so, who would you have portraying the characters, and who would make the movie?

CRZ: I have no particular wish to see a film made of the novel. I don't believe everything has to become a movie, a video game, a TV show, a T-shirt, or a piece of merchandising as a matter of course or just because the almighty dollar says so. I believe nothing can tell a story, explore the universe of its characters and its many wonders with the depth, joy, and effectiveness of a novel if it is done right. This is a book for people who love to read, who love books and reading, and it will remain so. Nobody can make a better film of this novel than the one you'll start to see when you begin to read its first pages. Film is a very interesting narrative language, and I use many of its elements — techniques from the grammar of images — to enrich the construction of the novel, but it is just one more piece in a much bigger puzzle. The greatest multiplex in the universe is inside your mind, and the only ticket you need is a good, well-written novel.

Q: To ask you a question you once asked author Christopher Fowler: The world ends next month and you've time to write one last book/story. What would it be about?

CRZ: You always write about yourself, know it or not, so I would just floor it to make the doomsday deadline and finish the novel I'm working on right now, which picks up this literary experiment of blending genres and traditions from where *The Shadow of the Wind* left it and takes it one, or two, steps further.

Q: What do you hope readers of *The Shadow of the Wind* will take away from your book?

CRZ: I think novels should be an experience. I want my readers to be thrilled, to be moved, to laugh, to cry, and to be terrified. To be stimulated. I want them to have the time of their lives and at the same time to look at the world, and themselves, in a different light. Many readers have told me that *The Shadow of the Wind* made them fall in love again with books and reading. If my book accomplishes that, I'll be more than happy.

Q: What can we hope to see from you next?

CRZ: I'm working on a new novel that picks up the mix of genres and techniques of *The Shadow of the Wind* and tries to take it to the next level. It is the second in a cycle of four books that I've planned in this "gothic Barcelona quartet," a sort of narrative kaleidoscope of Victorian sagas, intrigue, romance, comedy, mystery and "newly" fashioned old fashioned good storytelling.

Courtesy of Penguin Group

Discussion Questions

1. Julián Carax's and Daniel's lives follow very similar trajectories. Yet one ends in tragedy, the other in happiness. What similarities are there between the paths they take? What are the differences that allow Daniel to avoid tragedy?
2. Nuria Monfort tells Daniel, "Julián once wrote that coincidences are the scars of fate. There are no coincidences, Daniel. We are the puppets of our unconscious." What does that mean? What does she refer to in her own experience and in Julián's life?
3. Nuria Monfort's dying words, meant for Julián, are, "There are worse prisons than words." What does she mean by this? What is she referring to?
4. There are many devil figures in the story — Carax's Laín Coubert, Jacinta's Zacarias, Fermín's Fumero. How does evil manifest itself in each devil figure? What are the characteristics of the villains/devils?
5. Discuss the title of the novel. What is "*The Shadow of the Wind*"? Where does Zafón refer to it and what does he use the image to illustrate?
6. Zafón's female characters are often enigmatic, otherworldly angels full of power and mystery. Clara the blind white goddess ultimately becomes a fallen angel; Carax credits sweet Bea with saving his and Daniel's lives; Daniel's mother is actually an angel whose death renders her so ephemeral that Daniel can't even remember her face. Do you think Zafón paints his female characters differently than his male characters? What do the women represent in Daniel's life? What might the Freud loving Miquel Moliner say about Daniel's relationships with women?
7. Daniel says of *The Shadow of the Wind*, "As it unfolded, the structure of the story began to remind me of one of those Russian dolls that contain innumerable ever-smaller dolls within" (p. 7). Zafón's *The Shadow of the Wind* unfolds much the same way, with many characters contributing fragments of their own stories in the first person point of view. What does Zafón illustrate with this method of storytelling? What do the individual mini-autobiographies contribute to the tale?
8. The evil Fumero is the only son of a ridiculed father and a superficial, status-seeking mother. The troubled Julián is the bastard son of a love-starved musical mother and an amorous, amoral businessman, though he was raised by a cuckolded hatmaker. Do you think their personalities are products of nature or nurture? How are the sins of the fathers and mothers visited upon each of the characters?

Courtesy of Penguin Group