**Gothic Literature: An Introduction**

When you think of gothic horror, you probably immediately think of creepy graveyards, women in Victorian dresses fleeing in the night and foreboding castles on misty hills. In reality, there is no one defining feature of gothic literature. However, the most common gothic themes include an oppressive, isolated environment (think of the eponymous The Castle of Otranto or Wuthering Heights), supernatural threats, disturbing, and grotesque characters or situations and the past returning to haunt the present. These are often representations of social conflicts or the fears of the time. Present in all gothic horror is an overwhelming sense of dread and paranoia that isn’t just limited to the pages of the book, but also reflects a social paranoia.

The popularity of gothic literature has ebbed and flowed over time. The Enlightenment’s focus on reason and logic meant that gothic literature’s supernatural elements were viewed with disdain. However, like a ghost, it returns to haunt the living. This new gothic horror revival begs the question—what makes it so popular in the 2000’s? The novel you will read to encapsulate these ideas is Carlos Ruiz Zafon’s *The Shadow of the Wind*. This unit will be focused on what the elements of the Modern Gothic consist of in an academic setting, and importantly – how these elements connect to previous units (Aestheticism, Modernism, Post Modernism).

This is your guiding question for the entire unit:

**How does Carlos Ruiz Zafon’s novel *The Shadow of the Wind* represent the Modern Gothic? Which elements of the novel are the most prevalent to the movement?**

These are the parts to the unit:

1. Annotated bibliography on “The Modern Gothic” by Linda Dryden – focusing on the different archetypes of Gothic Literature in a modern age.
2. Close reading passages that are focused on different facets of the Gothic image (represented by characters, the metropolis, the sensibilities & the dualism of both setting and personality).
3. Discussion questions for in class analysis of the book.
4. Reading of the novel *The Shadow of the Wind* academically to answer the question above.

Reading guide – 14-day plan for the class:

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PART I: Close reading (X 5)

**I. First Impressions:**

1. What is the first thing you notice about the passage?
2. What is the second thing?
3. Do the two things you noticed complement each other? Or contradict each other?
4. What mood does the passage create in you as a reader? Why?

**II. Vocabulary and Diction:**

1. Which words do you notice first? Why did they stand out from the others?
2. How do the important words relate to one another?
3. Does a phrase here appear elsewhere in the story or poem?
4. Do any words seem oddly used to you? Why? Is that a result of archaic language? Or deliberate weirdness?
5. Do any words have double meanings? Triple meanings? What are all the possible ways to read it?
6. Look up any unfamiliar words. For a pre-20th century text, look in the Oxford English Dictionary for possible outdated meanings. Look up very common words as well since they often have several possible meanings.

**III. Discerning Patterns:**

1. Does an image here remind you of an image elsewhere in the book?
2. How does this pattern fit into the pattern of the book as a whole?
3. How could this passage symbolize something in the entire work? Could this passage serve as a microcosm, a little picture, of what's taking place in the whole narrative or poem?
4. What is the sentence rhythm like? Short and choppy? Long and flowing? Does it build on itself or stay at an even pace? How does that structure relate to the content?
5. Look at the punctuation. Is there anything unusual about it? What about capitalization?
6. Is there any repetition within the passage? What words are repeated? Why are they repeated?
7. How many types of writing are in the passage? (e.g., narration, description, argument, dialogue, rhymed or alliterative poetry inserted into the prose passage, etc.)
8. Can you identify paradoxes in the author’s thought or subject?
9. What is left out or silenced? What would you expect the author to say that the author seems to have avoided or ignored? What could the author have done differently—and what’s the effect of the current choice?

**IV. Point of View and Characterization:**

1. How does the passage make us react or think about any characters or events within the narrative?
2. Are there colors, sounds, physical description that appeals to the senses? Does this imagery form a pattern? Why might the author have chosen that color, sound or physical description? Is it symbolic? Foreshadowing?
3. Who speaks in the passage? To whom does he or she speak? Does the narrator have partial or omniscient viewpoint? How does that viewpoint help or hinder the reader's comprehension?

**V. Symbolism, Schemes, Tropes:**

1. Are there metaphors, similes, figures of speech? What kinds? Why might the author have chosen them?
2. Is there one controlling metaphor? If not, how many different metaphors are there, and in what order do they occur? How might that be significant? Consult the "Schemes and Tropes" section of the Course Packet or on the class website under "Rhetoric" and see if any of these rhetorical tools appear in the writing.

**VI. Importance (the most vital part of the exercise):**

1. Why is it important for the reader to know what you have just analyzed and explained? How does the passage you have chosen help us understand the story, poem, or play more completely?

PART II: Socratic Seminars: *Small to Large groups before final literary analysis*

**Group 1**

1. 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.” 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?

2. What is Ruiz Zafón trying to say about books?

3. What was unique about the Barri Gotic (Gothic Quarter, Barcelona) setting of The Shadow of the Wind? In what ways did Zafon’s setting enhance the story?

4. Discuss the threatening devil-like characters in the novel – Lain Coubert, Fumero, Zacarias (the dream angel), etc.

**Group 2:**

5. Discuss the angelic depiction of female characters in the novel – Clara, Bea, Daniel’s mother.

6. What roles does Fermín play in the story?

7. What roles do Daniel’s parents play in this story?

8. 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. How did this Mansion influence the book and its characters?

9. “What role does the Sugus candy play in the novel? Why are Fermin and Daniel never without them?

**Group 3:**

10. Julian once wrote that coincidences are the scars of fate. There are no coincidences, Daniel. We are the puppets of our unconscious.” What does that statement mean? What was Nuria referring to?

11. Why does the author set the story in the midst of the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath?

12. 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?

13. What is the relationship between Daniel and Julián Carax?

14. 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?

**Group 4:**

15. ‘Books are mirrors: you only see in them what you already have inside you.’ (Julián Carax). Do you agree with Carax’s statement to Jorge Aldaya? Why/why not? In what ways was this your experience while reading The Shadow of the Wind?

16. What do you think do the Montblanc Meinsterstuck fountain pen or the “Victor Hugo” pen, as Daniel fondly calls it, symbolizes?

17. Julian never finds out why his relationship with Penelope was so taboo. To the end, everyone wanted to protect him from the real facts. If you were Julian, would you want to know?

18. 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.” What book was that for you? Are there any forgotten books you would like to rescue from obscurity?

19. What does the title of the book refer to? What (or who) is “The Shadow of the Wind?”