

## The Prince of Mist

Carlos Ruiz Zafón

ISBN 978-1-921656-35-4

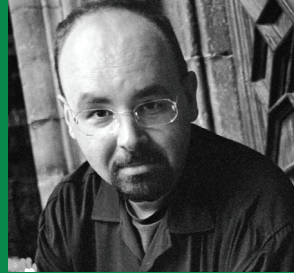
RRP AUS\$22.95, NZ\$28.00

Fiction, B paperback

Recommended for Lower/Middle Secondary

### Resource Kit Contains

- Synopsis
- Author information
- Themes
- Reading, Writing and Research Exercises
- Further Reading
- Writing Craft
- Book Structure



### Synopsis

Evil is personified in the form of the Prince of Mist who haunts his victims across decades and across time. It is impossible to escape the reach of his tentacles and those who are caught in his grasp, are destined to either bargain with evil or sacrifice their lives.

In this gothic novel for young adults written by Spanish novelist Carlos Ruiz Zafón, we meet Maximilian Carver, a watchmaker who decides that with war imminent and financial pressures growing, it is wise to relocate his family to a small seaside town. He acquires a large and once-opulent seaside home now in disrepair and the family settles in, attempting to make the most of their changed circumstances. But the house carries echoes of its past and ripples from by-gone days seem to waft into the life of the Carver family. Irina, the youngest daughter, is threatened by a force pulsating inside the locked bedroom cupboard. The power chases her, causing her to lose balance and fall down the stairs. Her desperate parents rush the unconscious Irina to hospital.

Alicia, the oldest child, finds a cat that behaves more like a predatory wolf as it attaches itself to her, while Max, the son, wanders to the back of the property to find a walled garden enveloped in mist containing statues of a circus troupe that seem to subtly alter their poses and create a sense of foreboding.

In spite of these oddities and an atmosphere of unease, Max and Alicia attempt to settle in, befriending young Roland who shows them around the town sharing the history of the Fleischmann family who built and settled in the home in which Max and his family now live. A warm friendship ensues and Max is clearly aware of the romantic magic that seems to have ignited between Alicia and Roland.

As a threesome, they visit the lighthouse where Victor Kray, Roland's grandfather, has spent a quarter of

a century keeping a light illuminated to ensure safe passage for passing ships. They spend time swimming and diving down to the wreck of the old Orpheus, which sank 25 years earlier on the coast before there was a lighthouse to protect the waters. But the significance of Kray's 25-year vigil and the link to the beachside home remain a mystery until the Prince of Mist comes back to reclaim past debts. Then, the pleasant friendships become embroiled in events from the past as the Prince of Mist, alias Dr. Cain, proves that time is an illusion and that promises must be kept.

This is the story of Evil, which takes on many guises. It casts its shadow in the house, it entraps victims in the statues of the walled garden and casts tentacles over the carcass of the Orpheus. It appears as a mist, a brewing storm, a magician and a cloud but the message resonates with clarity: no one can escape promises made to the Prince of Mist. All deals with the Devil must ultimately be repaid so that any imbalance is restored to the world.

It is a cruel lesson that thrusts Alicia and Max into adulthood as Roland pays his parents' debt.

### About the Author

**Carlos Ruiz Zafón** was born in Barcelona. He is one of the world's best-loved writers. His novels for adults, *The Shadow of the Wind* and *The Angel's Game*, have been translated into more than thirty-five languages and have sold over fifteen million copies worldwide. *The Prince of Mist*, his debut novel, won the prestigious Edebé Prize and is now the first of his young-adult novels to be published in English.

## Themes

### Evil and Retribution

This book is ultimately a reworking of the traditional tale of bargaining with the Devil known as a Faustian bargain. This motif has been present in literature for centuries and involves an individual who makes a promise with Satan (or indeed evil in any form) in order to acquire his desires. The Devil, however, always returns to collect his due. In some stories, the individual is able to outwit Evil through some clever trick but in the traditional tale, the ultimate price must be paid.

1. Students can research the term 'Faustian bargain' and students should read the original story or a retold version of *Faust* where Mephistopheles sells his soul to the Devil. This story can be discussed in relation to the character of the Prince of Mist. Refer specifically to p.97-101 and p.110-111 and p.173.

Attention should be paid to similarities and parallels. Draw up a comparative table where the two tales are set side by side.

- Is the rendition of the Devil as The Prince of Mist who can change shape and elude all, a successful portrayal of evil and the Devil? Why/ Why not?
- Is Zafón's transposition to modern times successful?

2. It would be helpful to study the Greek myth of Orpheus. Here again is a story where bargains are made with the devil (Hades). The following questions can be discussed:

- How is this Greek myth an example of a pact with the devil?
- What then is the significance of calling the ship in *The Prince of Mist* Orpheus?
- What is the reader meant to deduce about the direction that this story will take when he learns of the ship's name?
- Zafón cleverly hints at the Greek myth when he has Alicia almost slip from Max's grasp and when he has Roland dragged '...down to the depths.' Explain how this is both a foreshadowing of events to come as well as a reflection back to the myth.

3. There are a number of examples in literature, film and fable where the Devil is ultimately eluded in the Faustian bargain and also stories where he cannot be foiled as he returns to collect his due. These examples include, *Rumpelstiltskin* and *The Little Mermaid*.

After studying some examples, discuss the following points.

- What is the premise upon which these stories are predicated?
- If evil implies choice, then can the Devil character be accused of immorality or must we accept that the Devil, like the lion, is simply fulfilling his nature?

- These stories suggest that doing deals with Evil will ultimately require a repayment of the debt. Do you believe that justice ultimately prevails in the world: that the world has to rebalance itself and can not be cheated?

- What is the message at the heart of this motif?

4. Students are to examine the following sayings that focus on this motif and then choose one as the basis for an imaginative story that expands on this theme.

- Doing a deal with the Devil
- What goes around comes around
- Shaking hands with the Devil
- To be in bed with the Devil

5. The modern day interpretation of doing deals with the devil involves people in positions of power abusing that power. So when tobacco companies team with sporting events and doctors have allegiances with pharmaceutical companies, this is called 'being in bed with the devil'.

- Students should scour the papers and bring articles to class that illuminate this phenomenon.

6. Robert Bolt's play 'A Man for All Seasons' examines the question: Does every man have his price? This is essentially the premise that is explored in stories where men bargain with the Devil.

- Conduct an Oxford debate in which this question is examined. (An Oxford Debate involves the entire class. A proposition is put forward and students stand to the left of the class if they disagree and to the right if they agree. Students from each side then attempt to persuade others to change their view and cross the floor.)

### Illusion of Time

The Prince of Mist says that 'Time...is an illusion' and he is able to cast his influence and exert his power across generations. Time can not protect those who have a debt with him. This novel presents time as operating outside traditional dimensions. Clocks work backwards such as when '(t)he clock was not slow; it worked perfectly but with one peculiarity: it went backwards' (p.17), or when Max starts the old projector and it is 'as if a trapdoor had been opened into the past allowing Max to visit the house almost ten years before.' (p.160). When the Prince of Mist confronts Max he is clear, 'Time, dear Max doesn't exist.' (p.183)

1. How does making time into a liquid concept add tension and drama to this story? How does it work to add tension and drama to other stories that you have read where time is malleable?

- The teacher can draw student's attention to many of the classical tales i.e *Alice in Wonderland*, *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, *Tom's Midnight*

Garden etc for the above discussion.  
Other writers, artists and film makers have also examined this concept of the illusion of time and its relativity.

- Teachers could bring this extract from T. S. Eliot's poem *The Four Quartets* to class. Discuss the meaning of the opening few lines in which Eliot calls into question the concept of past and present and suggests that the continuum means that time really is an illusion.

*Time present and time past  
Are both perhaps present in time future,  
And time future contained in time past.  
If all time is eternally present  
All time is unredeemable.  
What might have been is an abstraction  
Remaining a perpetual possibility  
Only in a world of speculation.  
What might have been and what has been  
Point to one end, which is always present.  
Footfalls echo in the memory  
Down the passage which we did not take  
Towards the door we never opened  
Into the rose-garden.*

- The art teacher could be invited to class to present a session on Salvador Dali who used the motif of clocks drawn as 'soft watches' in many of his paintings to represent the relativity of time. The teacher should bring in copies of some of these images and the following questions should be discussed:

- What do the clocks represent?
- Why is time represented as malleable?
- What is Dali suggesting about time?

- Use one of the Dali paintings as an inspiration for a creative piece

**OR**

Write a creative piece where time becomes a character who controls and manipulates. These should be read out to the class on completion.

- Write the following quotes about time on the board and discuss.
  - 'Time is a conception to measure eternity.'  
Maharishi Mahesh Yogi
  - 'Time is an illusion.'  
Douglas Adams
  - 'As if you could kill time without injuring eternity!'  
Henry David Thoreau

---

### Further Reading

Zafon uses a walled garden in this novel as the setting where statues appear, move and disappear. Within the walls of the garden, time is altered, reality is changed and supernatural powers operate.

In literature, the garden is often used as a motif for exploring a new reality within a traditional world

### 1. Literature Circles

Class groups of 5 or 6 could choose to read either *The Secret Garden* (France Hodgson Burnett), or *Tom's Midnight Garden* (Phillipa Pearce).

On completion, students should present a group assignment that explores the way in which a new world is created in the garden of their story. A discussion about the use of the garden as the vehicle for time/reality travel might ensue.

- What is it about the garden that lends itself to this usage?
- How does your author suggest that there is a new reality operating in the garden?

**(The methodology of a Literary Circle:** The teacher provides multiple copies of selected texts and students choose to read a particular book based on personal preference after hearing a short introduction from the teacher. The students in each group decide on the number of pages to read each night and share their ideas the following day. Discussions are completely student directed. On completion of the book students conduct a brief presentation to the class. This can take a variety of forms including dramatic performance or Powerpoint presentation.)

---

### Craft of Writing

Zafón is clearly able to visualise scenes in graphic detail and so the book is quite cinematic with marvellous descriptions of characters and place.

- Draw attention to the following (and other) descriptions that evoke atmosphere and entice readers in with their rich attention to detail.
  - The description of the Orpheus (pp.69-70)
  - The description of the walled garden. (pp.26-28)
  - The many manifestations of Dr. Cain:
    - as a cat (pp.54, 72-73)
    - as a mist (p.124)
    - as a wolf (p.124)
    - as an underwater presence (p.147)
    - as a symbol (p.64)
    - as a voice (pp.67-69)
    - as the re-formed Orpheus (p.174)
    - as the clown (p.151)
- Students can prepare the above scenes as dramatic readings for presentation before the class. The music of the language will resonate with powerful readings and Zafón's skill will become evident.
- In the school yard students can write a description of their surroundings, aiming to create a vivid word picture. Attention to all the senses will add to the writing.

Teachers should also draw student attention to the rich use of metaphor, simile and personification that give life to the descriptions, particularly those which are used to describe the manifestations of the Prince of Mist.

4. Students should examine some of the above descriptions of the Prince of Mist and then write an analytical essay: That Zafón's portrayal of Evil is effective. To what extent do you agree?
5. Decide on a metaphor for the presentation of evil and use it in a passage of descriptive writing. Share the work with the class, even displaying it on a class noticeboard or a virtual noticeboard, such as the school intranet.

---

### Structure of the Book

It is important to be aware of the way in which structure, not just story and style, contribute to the mounting tension of the novel. The use of short chapters, the movement within the chapters that takes the reader from scene to scene and the jigsaw puzzle effect of scattering clues that only become clear at the end, all work toward building tension.

1. Allocate a chapter per student and each person will have the task of studying that chapter and determining the devices used in it. Guide questions might include the following:
  - How many scenes are presented in this chapter?
  - What elements of the puzzle are introduced?
  - What remains unresolved at this stage?
  - How does Zafón deepen the mystery?