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# REVISTA INCLUSIONES

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**PHILOLOGICAL CONCEPT OF THE NOVEL “THE SHADOW OF THE WIND”  
BY CARLOS RUIZ ZAFON**

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**Abstract**

The article exposes the philological concept of the modern postmodern novel “The Shadow of the Wind” by Spanish writer C.R. Zafon, the most important aspects of which are shown through the key topic and problematic field of the work, speculation about the fate of books in the modern world; the image of the protagonist and his/her occupation, as well as through a key conceptual metaphor, story line, plot structure, composition, and ideological content of the novel.

**Keywords**

Postmodern novel – Philological novel – Philological concept – Key conceptual metaphor

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## Introduction

Modernity is characterized by the upsurge in scholarly interest in the genre transformations of the novel of the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, which, according to modern scholars, involves "an immanent genre paradox that does not lend itself to stable systematization and structuring"<sup>1</sup>. Literary criticism cannot "predict all the plastic possibilities of the novel," as is stated by M.M. Bakhtin<sup>2</sup>, which highlights the task of timely scientific comprehension of the genres and genre modifications of the novel that are affirmed in literary practice – according to statistics, the most popular works of literary work among readers.

Special genre modifications of the modern novel provoke a lively discussion among scholars. Literary scholars of Russia and Western Europe, first of all, rate the so-called philological novel among them – a genre the very "name" of which for many years has been a synonym for dry bookishness, secondariness, labored style in the public literary consciousness<sup>3</sup>. In this connection, until the end of the 20th century, the genre itself existed and developed latently, according to V.I Novikov, "appearing in a quiet style of dress of biographical investigation or memoirs, of either harlequin novel or adventure novel, of either utilitarian book or educating book"<sup>4</sup>. Only by discovering "life-giving philology" in the literary text<sup>5</sup>, the scholars realized that they were faced with a work of a special – unnamed – genre that has now (over the past two decades) been recognized as philological one. All in all, the actualization of scientific interest in philological novel dictates the need for further research on its genre specificity based on the latest works of world literature, primarily those to which particular attention is drawn by critics and the general readership.

## Discussion

This article aims to determine the philological concept of a contemporary post-modern novel of the Spanish writer, C.R. Zafon, *The Shadow of the Wind*.

As evidenced by modern literary studies, postmodern novel is not susceptible of a clear and unambiguous definition of the topic. However, in relation to the novel *The Shadow of the Wind* the author decides on the topic of the work for the reader, "This is a story about books"<sup>6</sup>. And he clarifies further, "About the evil books, about a person who wrote them, about a character who leapt from the pages of the novel to commit these books to the flames, about betrayal and about lost friendship. This is a story about love, about hatred and about dreams living in the shadow of the wind."<sup>7</sup>. However, immediately, with his characteristic postmodern irony, C.R. Zafon makes allowance for deliberate "lowering" of the claimed pathos in the theme of the novel, "This is what they write on the covers of cheap novels"<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> V. A. Pesterev, "A Novel Prose of the West of the Turn of 20th and 21st Centuries", Bulletin of Perm University. Russian and Foreign Philology, Issue 3(15) (2011): 155.

<sup>2</sup> N. M. Bakhtin, Epos and Novel (SPb.: Azbuka, 2000), 194.

<sup>3</sup> V. I. Novikov, "Philological Novel. Old New Genre at the Turn of the Century", Novy Mir, Issue 10 (1999): 193.

<sup>4</sup> V. I. Novikov, Philological Novel. Old New Genre at the Turn... 194.

<sup>5</sup> V. I. Novikov, Philological Novel. Old New Genre at the Turn... 194.

<sup>6</sup> C. F. Zafon, *The Shadow of the Wind* (Moscow: ROSMAN-PRESS, 2006), 93.

<sup>7</sup> C. F. Zafon, *The Shadow of the Wind*... 94.

<sup>8</sup> C. F. Zafon, *The Shadow of the Wind*... 94.

And again, justifying his own formulation of the theme of the work, in the words of his character Zafon argues, "In fact, this story is as real as the bread that was brought to us at least three-days-old. And like all true stories, it begins and ends in the cemetery ..."<sup>9</sup>. Thus, the theme of the work can be defined as a realistic (which is especially important for the author) narrative about the fate of books in the modern world. It is logical to conclude that the subject of the work is philological.

Within the framework of the declared subject, in the pages of the novel C.R. Zafon gradually forms the problematic field of the work, successively poses to the reader the most problematic issues of his concern: 1) What is the role of the book in human life? 2) What is the role of the book in the formation of the individual? 3) What is the fortune (fate) of books in the modern (post-war) world? 4) What are the prospects for book publishing in the 20th century? 5) How does a society that sends books to the "cemetery" feel and develop? 6) How to save books from undeserved oblivion? 7) How to imbibe into the minds of people a taste for reading? 8) What is the deep connection between the author and the reader and how is it realized? 9) How to support a young talented writer, torn by intrapersonal conflicts and reversals of fortune, in the modern world? All these questions prove that the problematic field of the novel *The Shadow of the Wind* is philological.

Zafon himself is convinced and seeks to convince the reader that the books have souls, "Every spine, every book of those that you can see has a soul. In its soul there live the souls of those who wrote the book, those who read it and let their mind wander about it. Every time when a book comes into new hands, every time when someone glances over its pages, its spirit grows and becomes stronger"<sup>10</sup>. Books are like people with their individual spiritual world, experience, destiny. That is why book has every right to be a true friend of man. The question of the role of the book in the formation of an individual personality is consistently considered throughout the whole narrative – through the example of the fortune of the protagonist, Daniel Sempere. At the same time, he arrives at a more comprehensive decision in relation to the personality formation of another character – Clara Barcelo, who asserts, "Before, reading was a duty for me, a kind of tribute, which, for some unknown reason, must be paid to teachers and mentors. I did not know how to derive enjoyment from the text, the discoveries taking place in the soul, a free flight of the imagination, the beauty and mystery of fiction and language. The book of Carax has revealed all this to me"<sup>11</sup>. At the same time, the books in the perception of Carlos Zafon are such perfect and unique creations that, again quoting Clara Barcelo, "Trying to retell the plot would be like describing the cathedral as a pile of stones topped with a spire"<sup>12</sup>. The problem of undeserved oblivion as a sad destiny of books in the modern (post-war) world is the most important in the novel *The Shadow of the Wind*. This is confirmed from the very first lines by the introduction into the text of a key conceptual metaphor of the novel the Cemetery of Forgotten Books, "From time immemorial, there has been a cemetery of forgotten books in Barcelona – a mysterious labyrinth from the bookshelves that is known to only a select few"<sup>13</sup>. For every booklover, "this is an intimate place, a sanctuary"<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>9</sup> C. F. Zafon, *The Shadow of the Wind*... 94.

<sup>10</sup> C. F. Zafon, *The Shadow of the Wind*... 13.

<sup>11</sup> C. F. Zafon, *The Shadow of the Wind*... 31.

<sup>12</sup> C. F. Zafon, *The Shadow of the Wind*... 32.

<sup>13</sup> C. F. Zafon, *The Shadow of the Wind*... 5.

<sup>14</sup> C. F. Zafon, *The Shadow of the Wind*... 6.

Even the view of the book cemetery, as befits a cemetery, is depressing, "Before us a structure that resembled the ruins of an abandoned palace, where a museum of echoes and shadows could be located, towered"<sup>15</sup>. And yet, despite this, that the books are abandoned, forgotten by readers, the Cemetery of books is "a palace", "a temple", "honeycombs filled with honey"<sup>16</sup>. Currently, in modern society, books are in serious danger - "the danger of being destroyed, the danger of being forgotten", because the cemetery of forgotten books is "the last refuge" for them<sup>17</sup>. "Being securely sheltered in the Labyrinth, they are waiting for their only reader – because by tradition, a person who first gets to this unique library has the right to choose one book for themselves, having previously promised to keep it and in no case to prevent from its disappearing"<sup>18</sup>.

The plot of the work is based on this tradition created by the philological thinking of the author, and all story lines begin to unfold from its implementation by Sempere-father and son.

According to the plot, the action of the literary work *The Shadow of the Wind* takes place in Barcelona in 1945. The protagonist, Daniel Sempere, finds an interesting book in the so-called "book cemetery", which is shrouded in a curtain of mystery and intrigue. Having vowed to keep his discovery – Julian Carax's novel *The Shadow of the Wind*, Daniel takes on some commitment that will have forever changed his life.

The boy's impression gained from the novel has not faded over the years: getting older, Daniel rekindles dreams of investigating the fortune of the author of *The Shadow of the Wind*. The main character is amazed by the fact that what is on the paper in this book is mystically translated into reality. It turns out that Daniel is not the only one who is interested in information about Julian Carax. Daniel is tagged behind by police inspector Fumero, known throughout Barcelona as a murderous police inspector and ruthless executioner, as well as a mysterious stranger with a disfigured face, who has taken on the name of one of the most sinister characters of *The Shadow of the Wind* (the devil), whose life purpose is to destroy any memory about Carax and his books.

The plot of Zafon's novel is non-linear but network, or, in the terminology of postmodernism, rhizome. The events from the past are intertwined with the events from the present, and those, in turn, are intertwined with the fictional events from a fictional literary work. As a result, in structural terms, Zafon's work is, as shown in Fig. 1, a labyrinthine novel.

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<sup>15</sup> C. F. Zafon, *The Shadow of the Wind*... 6.

<sup>16</sup> C. F. Zafon, *The Shadow of the Wind*... 7.

<sup>17</sup> C. F. Zafon, *The Shadow of the Wind*... 7.

<sup>18</sup> C. F. Zafon, *The Shadow of the Wind*... 8.

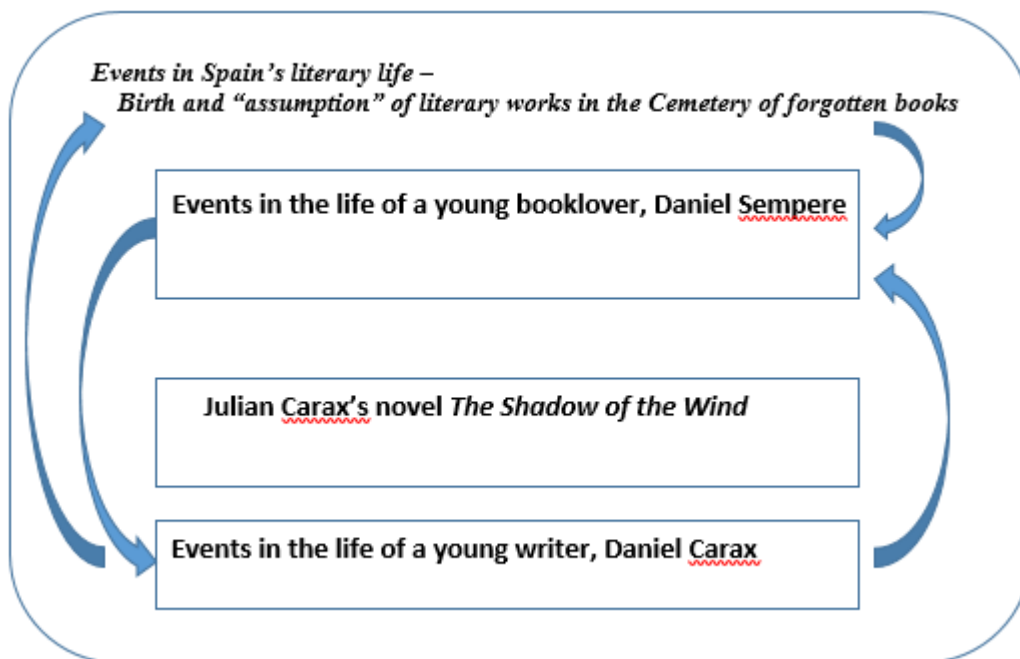


Figure 1

The Structure of the Labyrinthine Novel *the Shadow of the Wind* by Carlos Zafon

It is important to note that the very conceptual construct of the Cemetery of Forgotten Books is also a labyrinth that refers the reader to the myth of the Minotaur. Saving a book (hiding it in the cemetery of forgotten books from burning), Daniel acts strictly according to the plot of the named myth (he makes nicks in the labyrinth).

In addition to an integral – philological – dimension, the work by Zafon has quite a genre facets of a detective story and a gothic (or rather, neo-Gothic) novel, characteristic of this genre, as was shown at the stage of theoretical research.

The detective storyline is based on a riddle formulated by the very character (Daniel), "I want to know who Julian Carax is and where to find his other books, unless he has written something else"<sup>19</sup>. Later, in the course of the literary investigation undertaken by him, another mystery becomes actual: why does someone want to destroy all copies of all the works by Carax, having made a bonfire of them?

For a long time, Daniel has been trying to solve up mysteries of *The Shadow of the Wind*, now and then encountering weird strangers, beautiful ladies, exploring abandoned estates and trying to understand inconceivable incidents related to the lives of people who are overwhelmed by burning love and no less burning hatred. Mysterious villains from the events of the Civil War in Spain real for the characters of the novel, as well as from the very fictional novel that has radically changed the fortune of the young man, stand in the road of Daniel. So, the main character becomes involved in a real confrontation, the gain in which should be the answers to the questions nagging at him, related to the secret book, which he has chosen at the Cemetery of Forgotten Books. An intricate detective story is very diverse.

<sup>19</sup> C. F. Zafon, *The Shadow of the Wind*... 9.

Thus, the main and good part of the novel is a rather gloomy detective story, and the little things of life of Francoist Spain delineated scrupulously (as if photographed by the author) attach gloominess to it. But the tempo of the narrative is manifestly slowing down, and the detective gives way to a gothic love story in which the haunted mansion enters into the picture, the smell of decay prevails and a tomb with the bones and remnants of a young girl embracing a dead baby is discovered.

The analysis of the text allows for the assertion that the very detective story line and the Gothic (neo-Gothic) motifs are charged with a thoroughly developed philological problems of the novel. Its composition is also conducive to it: although the period of the literary work is very long, only a small part of the novel is designated for modernity. Everything else is the past, which is recalled through memories, letters, dreams, which the narrator learns from other characters. By doing it deliberately, the author aims to eliminate excessive pathos and melodramatics, which makes it possible to relate objectively the terrible and vile phenomena without embellishing or understating them. This technique affects the reader much more convincingly than vivid colorful descriptions.

People to be indifferent to books (such as the parents of Julian Carax – the Fortun family) live by "having imposed silence upon their own hearts and souls, until, finally, because of prolonged silence, they have forgotten all the words that express true feelings and have turned into strangers living under the same roof – they share the same destiny as many families living in this great city"<sup>20</sup>.

Society without a love of reading resembles, according to Zafon, "a menagerie"<sup>21</sup>. The author speaks about the "potential" of such society through the lips of professor of philology don Anacleto, "My God! There are not students but real monkeys in the classrooms. Darwin was a naive dreamer, I assure you. Evolution nothing, for goodness sake! I've got nine orangutans, none are sane"<sup>22</sup>.

In a modern society, where nobody reads, there is barbarism, people are getting stupid. As Fermin (a friend of Daniel, a character who also translates the author's convictions) says, "Evil implies moral determinism, intention, and a certain amount of mental activity. Fools and barbarians don't ever engross in thought or contemplation. They act in obedience to their instincts, like animals in the barnyard, convinced that they do good, that they are always right about everything, being proud that they are always ready – I apologize – to own anyone who is at least somewhat different from them, whether in color skin, religion, language, nationality, or a kind of leisure. What our world really needs for is more true villains and less savage half-animals in it"<sup>23</sup>.

In such – barbarously decaying – society, second-hand booksellers and reading bibliophiles are "a community of the outcast"<sup>24</sup> and even – according to Zafon's figurative definition – "a secret fraternity – of alchemists, participants in a covert plot being weaved behind the scenes of an unsuspecting world"<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> C. F. Zafon, *The Shadow of the Wind*... 223.

<sup>21</sup> C. F. Zafon, *The Shadow of the Wind*... 257.

<sup>22</sup> C. F. Zafon, *The Shadow of the Wind*... 292.

<sup>23</sup> C. F. Zafon, *The Shadow of the Wind*... 317.

<sup>24</sup> C. F. Zafon, *The Shadow of the Wind*... 26.

<sup>25</sup> C. F. Zafon, *The Shadow of the Wind*... 27.

It is precisely these "outcasts" who are to conceive the whole depth of the tragedy of "assumption" of books that still did not find their readers, which Zafon poetically writes about, presenting his own views via Daniel's reflections, "Walking in the shadows past the endless rows of books, I could not get rid of sadness and annoyance. The thought that if I discovered the whole Universe in an unknown book among the infinity of this necropolis, tens of thousands of others would remain unread by anyone, forgotten forever haunted me"<sup>26</sup>.

According to the scholars, an eventful content of the postmodern novel always exerts to give a certain moral lesson for the reader. In this regard, the "lesson" of Carlos Zafon is simple: everyone should read, thereby delivering books from "captivity of oblivion", reviving them, taking responsibility for their fortunes (symbolically accepting this mission from the author).

Subtly describing the emotional and spiritual state of reading, Zafon invites the reader to immerse in the world reflected by works of art as often as possible. Reading is the path of spiritual growth for a person, their salvation from the captivity of barbaric society. "Books are like mirrors: they only reflect what is in your soul," thinks Zafon<sup>27</sup>. The deeper the reader plunges into the book, the more they develop themselves, "A written word can make my existence full, as if to recover my lost sight"<sup>28</sup>.

At the same time, Zafon sees a special potential for the "start" of spiritual growth precisely in the first deeply perceived book, arguing, "There is hardly anything that can exert such an influence on the reader as the first book that paved the way towards his/her heart. Those first images, the echo of words, that seem to us, remained far in the past, have been accompanying us all our lives. In our memory, they are erecting a palace in which – no matter how many books we have read later, no matter how many worlds we have discovered, no matter how much we have learnt and forgotten, we will inevitably have to return"<sup>29</sup>. Such author's decision attaches a special value to the tradition of "introducing the lad" into the "temple" (The Cemetery of Forgotten Books), that is, into the old rich library, as a modern reader interprets the metaphor. This tradition can and should be fixed in the modern families of Spain (and all other countries where readers of the novel come from). It is precisely this desire of the author that the ring tracking of the whole work indicates in the same situation – the first coming of the father and his growing (ten-year-old) son to the Cemetery of forgotten books.

The ideological content of the novel *The Shadow of the Wind* is not limited to solving the problem of "salvation" of the literary "treasures" of civilization forgotten by mankind. Zafon forms not only the reader but the very writer. First of all, he claims that in the presence of a talent for writing one should create in any circumstances.

The mission of Daniel in the fate of writer Carax is to give him the symbolic "Hugo's pen", with which he dreamed of writing works by himself, but did not find enough talent, experience, or other resources for himself. The pen is for very Julian. There is an "exchange of values" at the end of the novel: the writer receives the pen of his great predecessor intended for him, and the reader gains the award – "a new book with a

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<sup>26</sup> C. F. Zafon, *The Shadow of the Wind*... 19.

<sup>27</sup> C. F. Zafon, *The Shadow of the Wind*... 57.

<sup>28</sup> C. F. Zafon, *The Shadow of the Wind*... 33.

<sup>29</sup> C. F. Zafon, *The Shadow of the Wind*... 112.

magical aroma"<sup>30</sup>. So, according to Zafon, it is precisely a thoughtful, competent, grateful reader who is able to support the writer's fate, which is torn by intrapersonal conflicts and varieties of the author's fortune in the modern world, to preserve or even reanimate their craving for literary creativity, the ability to create talented works.

Of particular importance in the system of ideas of Carlos Zafon, represented by him throughout the pages of the novel *The Shadow of the Wind*, is the conviction that not everyone is destined to become an outstanding writer, but everyone can become a worthy (attentive, thoughtful, grateful, responsible) reader. In the final of the work, Zafon, in words of his character, declares, "The art of reading is gradually dying, this is a purely personal act and book is a mirror in which we see what we have in the soul, putting our mind and soul into reading, and these virtues are becoming less common.

Every month we get a lot of offers to sell our [book] shop, they want to open a store of TVs, clothes or shoes in its place. But we can leave the house heels foremost"<sup>31</sup>. Such is the life credo of the bibliophile.

The main character does not become a writer, although all the plot conflicts encourage him to this. According to Zafon, the world is not equal to the text – it is more complicated and interesting. And in light of this, the choice made by the characters – Julian Carax (the writer) and Daniel Sempere (the reader and second-hand book player) – at the end of the book, is quite logical.

## Conclusion

On the whole, the analysis makes it possible to characterize the concept of Carlos Zafon's novel *The Shadow of the Wind* as philological one based on the specifics of the theme of the work, its problematic field, key conceptual metaphor, storyline, plot structure, composition, and ideological content.

Zafon's novel is a new genre modification of the philological novel – a labyrinthine novel that encompasses the interweaving and interaction of events, meanings, ideas of the fictional novel *The Shadow of the Wind*, the fortunes of its author Julian Carax and the reader (book lover and hereditary second-hand book player), Daniel Sempere, as well as the events of the literary life of Spain in relation to the aspect of birth and "assumption" of works of the past and the present in the Cemetery of Forgotten Books (in the old library of Barcelona).

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<sup>30</sup> C. F. Zafon, *The Shadow of the Wind*... 632.

<sup>31</sup> C. F. Zafon, *The Shadow of the Wind*... 634.

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