

## **The Supernatural in Carlos Ruiz Zafón's Young Adult Fiction: The New Revival of Gothic?**

Ever since that day, Jawahal's tormented spirit  
has been tied to the infernal machine he created,  
a machine that, in death, gave him  
eternal life as a spectre of darkness (Zafón 2012: 216)

Even a short glimpse at the history of the world allows for a reflection that some periods of time, rather than others, are marked with a greater commotion and upheaval. The 18<sup>th</sup> century, especially its last decades, emerged as a time of both intellectual and socio-political turmoil leading to far-reaching changes. It was a time not only of the Industrial Revolution, the movement revolutionising Britain's industry and stimulating huge social effects. It likewise was the time of the American War of Independence and the French Revolution. Those two political disturbances indicated an enormous potential and yearning for exchanging the old system of principles of social life based upon tyranny for entirely new ideals based upon democracy, fraternity, equality and liberty. The glorious mission of the latter, however, backfired upon its later resorting to terror and even more stigmatising political despotism.

Nevertheless, it is beyond any doubt that the commotion in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was a stimulus for changes in the literary concepts of the Augustans. They started being aware of the fact that a considerable reliance upon realism, satire and moral purpose shaping the literary output promoting neoclassical ideals had become, in view of the above-mentioned socio-political changes, untenable and even archaic. They seemed to have started believing in prophetic words voiced by Hamlet: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in our philosophy" (Shakespeare 1995: I.v.168-69). Thus as a reaction against a blinding aspect of reason the middle of the century saw a greater significance of sensibility perceived as a tendency for being affected by emotions and passions. This inclination for sentiment was partly responsible for stimulating writers – not only the graveyard poets – to look for inspiration in the past, especially in the history of the age of chivalry, and exoticism, times endowed with vigour.

At that time one could observe as sentiment and an emotional approach replaced satire; mystery and the supernatural superseded rationality and formal refinement, encouraging writers to pen the works of fiction attacking the common sense and metaralism. Thus, because of an increasing disillusionment with bloodstained revolutions and a weakening influence of realism the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the appearance of the Gothic novel perceived as an offspring of "an interest in the past, in the primitive, in the wild aspects of nature, in the various revelations of the supernatural" (Zgorzelski 2008: 160) wherein a man's deepest passions and fears were literalised chiefly as the supernatural phenomena, terror and

mystery. The Gothic novel, featuring dark tales of tragedy, romance, revenge, torture and ancient villainies, tinged with horror and the uncanny, became the vogue in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and the early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

In accordance with the genre's formulaic constitution, the Gothic novel is ordinarily set in grim places evocative of the historic past such as graveyards, ruins, dungeons, mysterious abbeys (*The Monk*) or castles with secret underground passages, strange chambers, and dank corridors (*The Castle of Otranto*). Those spatial entities – perceived by literary critics as an “expedition into the unconscious” (Kelly 2002: 158) – are paradigmatically haunted by the supernatural beings and monsters seen as both an enthrallment and fear of what is different; they likewise are cloaked in a universal mystery. Very often the writers based their narratives upon the existence of an unknown atrocity committed in the past (*The Castle of Otranto*) gravely stigmatising prosperity of future generations dwelling in the aforementioned places. In truth, with these tales originates what was to become one of the most crucial concepts of the Gothic fiction: the revisiting of the sins of the fathers upon their children. What is more, the central characters presented in a typical Gothic novel possess traits that of romantic protagonists, going beyond the borders of social mores, of nature, and of religion. Hence, as it is held by Sikorska, “a heroine was an image of idealised beauty and innocence, the image of sublimated sexual fantasy, while Gothic villains were archetypal villain-heroes showing unrestrained, frequently sinful, passions” (Sikorska 2007: 299).

Apart from those conventions, the Gothic novel develops the following recurrent themes. The reader is sure to 1.) come across a highly complicated plot infused with mystifying elements and suspense (*The Mysteries of Udolpho*); 2.) find a story taking place in one of Catholic countries as the setting of the most atrocious crimes (*The Monk*); 3.) observe the deployment of horrifying descriptions of the macabre aimed at enhancing a general sense of gloominess and mystery. Significantly, this sort of fiction is soaked with claustrophobia, sexual desire, fright and brutality. On account of exploring themes and concepts so willingly embraced by readers weary of the quotidian of realism, the first work of fiction identified as Gothic, Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), was immediately followed by a plethora of imitations. These include, among others: William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786) incorporating such Gothic elements as ruins, sorcery and a Faustian person selling his soul to the Devil, Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) featuring a menacing count and a castle, Matthew Gregory Lewis' *The Monk* (1796) featuring Ambrosio, a satanic abbot of a monastery, Matilda, a temptress and Lucifer's apprentice; a maliciously arrogant prioress and the supernatural figure of the Bleeding Nun.

Those works of fiction, in their turn, successfully stimulated the subsequent generations of the 19<sup>th</sup> century authors such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Lord Byron, Mary Shelley, Walter Scott, Edgar Allan Poe, Robert Louis Stevenson, Oscar Wilde and Bram Stoker who created the most significant cornerstones of the Gothic fiction; literary works whose potential for depicting terror, mystery and the macabre has so far been internationally acclaimed. And, in view of its expanding popularity, it came as a complete surprise that such thriving a genre abruptly passed into oblivion in the 20<sup>th</sup> century fiction leaving its place for ghost stories represented by such writer as Susan Hill or Montague Rhodes James. Their works, unlike the Gothic stories soaking with

violence, terror, mystery and sexuality, can be easily “read out loud to the whole family, in a darkened room in front of a blazing fire” (Collings 1996: vii). In this sort of fiction the horror, unlike in the Gothic, is suggested by “a surprising and unnerving phrase, mentioning an unexpected or incongruous shadow or an eerie sound” (Davies 2007: v). Despite the fact that, as it is asserted by David Punter in *A Companion to the Gothic*, “a cluster of texts towards the end of the nineteenth century, by such writers as Stoker, Stevenson, Wells and Wilde, constitutes a kind of Gothic renaissance” (2004: 2), Gothic fiction proper seemed to have completely disappeared in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the period of two most bloody and atrocious wars in the world history, but is it all true?

Essentially, the purpose of this article is an endeavour of defining one of the literary examples of modern fiction as Gothic regardless of the fact that the literary Gothic proper is thought to have been banished in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the same time, the concern of the paper is not merely a meticulous analysis of the 1994 *The Midnight Palace* (*El palacio de la medianoche*), one of Carlos Ruiz Zafón’s earlier novels belonging to the so-called Young Adult fiction, but rather an observation if the paradigm proposed in the Gothic classics of the 18<sup>th</sup> century bears similarities to the Spanish novelist’s literary output. The objective of the article also lies in the fact, supposing the gothicness of the Spaniard’s novels is proven, whether we can hail his works as a harbinger of an entirely new revival of Gothic at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. And although the concern will be focused only upon one literary work of only one author,<sup>1</sup> the theses which are going to be put forth in the paper are meant to be, I believe, of a much wider applicability.

## The Setting

Jacek Mydla, in his *Spectres of Shakespeare: Appropriations of Shakespeare in the Early English Gothic*, while enumerating all possible formulaic characteristics or meanings of Gothic fiction, holds that the architectural trait “is by far the most frequent occurrence in the ‘Gothic stories’” (2009: 174). This feature of the presented

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1. Generally speaking all Young Adult novels penned by Carlos Ruiz Zafón tend to be similar as far as presentation of the Gothic elements. This is why instead of analysing particular stories in details the author of the article has decided to focus attention upon *The Midnight Palace* as the example disclosing the widest spectrum of the Gothic features. In this novel they are presented with a considerable depth and attention. *The Prince of Mist* follows the adventures of Max Carver whose new house stands next to the garden filled with sinister statues, in the centre of which he observes the supernatural figure of joker, Cain who, as the Prince of Mist, emerges to meet the conditions of the Faustian pact, settled with Fleischmann 25 years prior to the action proper. Cain’s sunken shipwreck *Orpheus* assumes the same role of headquarters as Jawahal’s isolated railway station. *The Watcher in the Shadows* presents the magnificent mansion Cravenmoore located in a seemingly haunted forest owned by a reclusive toymaker Lazarus Jann. Like Jawahal’s tormented soul, Lazarus’ doppelgänger, a powerful shadow, miasmatically shatters the peaceful existence of Irene and her family. *Marina*, the last of Young Adult novels, following the adventures of Oscar Draï and his new friend Marina, is entirely wrapped in ethereal atmosphere. The story shows Barcelona, bearing a striking resemblance to Calcutta, as a mirage of avenues and winding roads. It is the home of an outlandish doctor Kolvenik whose factory with artificial limbs for a miserable humanity is as infamous as any other Gothic spatial entity.

world indubitably initiates and stimulates a narrative dynamic; it is also closely associated with the presence of the supernatural, the macabre and suspense, creating the atmosphere for an entire work of fiction. Gothic topography is conventionally made up of either man-made places such as castles with a labyrinth of underground passages, dungeons and convents with subterranean sepulchres or natural places such as the woods or a marsh. Significantly, those elements of the setting are frequently the headquarters of villains, devising and eventually committing their heinous crimes. Hence, very often the spatial entities function as instruments of tyranny and oppression. Conversely, they can at times fulfil a liberating role, as it is, for instance, with Isabella in *The Castle of Otranto* who, after having accepted Theodore's help, finds a trapdoor in "a subterraneous passage, which led from the vaults of the castle to the church of St. Nicholas" (Walpole 1998: 23). In truth, the objective of the setting in the Gothic fiction is formulated as something more crucial than just scenery for the developing plot.

The setting designed by Zafón is incredibly similar to the paradigm proposed by the 18<sup>th</sup> century Gothic writers. Set in Calcutta in the 1930s, *The Midnight Palace* begins on a dark night when an English lieutenant strives to save newborn twins Ben and Sheere from an insidious threat posed by an unidentified supernatural being. From the very inception of the story the capital of the Indian state of West Bengal is being defined by means of frequent references to its labyrinth-like constitution, overwhelming mysteriousness, death and mayhem. Like the dungeon in a castle, this "accursed city" (Zafón 2012: 2), being in fact "the ghostly labyrinth of streets" (Zafón 2012: 6) brimful with "the nocturnal inhabitants" (Zafón 2012: 9), emerges before our eyes as "a city even God did not dare enter" (Zafón 2012: 7) and whose "mysteries were concealed in the streets that lay beneath the stars of the Bengali Peninsula" (Zafón 2012: 37).

What is more, its mazy and perplexed character is enhanced by a fact that it is in its essence a sort of racial melting pot of "Bengalis, Armenians, Jews, Anglo-Saxons, Chinese, Muslims and numerous other groups who had come to the land of Kali in search of fortune or refuge" (Zafón 2012: 28) making it appear to be, at the surface, a harmless place to live. However, apart from pandemonium triggered by the activity of people who were constructing this maze of intertwining streets, nature itself – acting like an executive of a celestial curse put on the city – has been posing a dreadful threat to inhabitants. The imprecation, however, has been active since time immemorial as it is depicted by a renowned engineer Lahawaj Chandra Chatterghee in his book entitled *Shiva's Tears*. The book recounts a story about Shiva's perilous journey he makes so as to find a remedy for a terrible plague that is decimating Calcutta's inhabitants who, after having been waiting for a long time, accept help offered by a sorcerer who asks for a cure an exceptionally high price: the soul of every child born after that day. As a direct consequence of the disobedience "the curse of terrible heat fell upon the city and the gods turned their backs on it, leaving it at the mercy of the night spirits" (Zafón 2012: 79). The author of the story – revealing the attribute of a myth and bearing an affinity with the Old Testament story depicting Moses' journey to Mount Sinai, his prolonged absence and his wrath at finding his people worshipping a golden calf – is also touched by the pestilence. During one of their meetings Aryami Bose, Ben and Sheere's grandmother reluctantly informs them

of their departed father, Lahawaj:

When your father was young and roamed the streets of Calcutta, dreaming about numbers and mathematical formulae, he met a lonely orphan boy of his own age. At the time your father lived in the most abject poverty and, like so many children in this city he caught one of the fevers that claim thousands of lives every year. During the rainy season the monsoon unleashed powerful storms over the Bengali Peninsula, flooding the entire Ganges Delta and the surrounding area. Year after year the salt lake that still lies to the east of the city would overflow; and when the rain ceased and the water level subsided, all the dead fish were exposed to the sun, producing a cloud of poisonous fumes which winds from the mountains in the north would then blow over Calcutta, spreading illness and death like some infernal plague (Zafón 2012: 123)

who (Lahawaj) composed an extraordinary poem about Calcutta; a poem brimming with the Gothic-like imagery:

The city I Love is a dark, deep  
house of misery, a home to evil spirits  
in which no one will open a door, nor a heart.  
The city I love lives in the twilight,  
shadow of wickedness and forgotten glories,  
of fortunes sold and souls in torment.  
The city I love loves no one, it never rests; it is a  
tower erected to the uncertain hell of our destiny,  
of the enchantment of a course that was written in blood,  
the dance of deceit and infamy,  
bazaar of my sadness (Zafón 2012: 153)

Being attacked by both internal and external forces, the city assumes the form of a catacomb or a sepulchre in *The Monk*, on one hand offering sanctuary for a person who has an audacity to hide in its bowels, but on the other being a place of death.

Nevertheless, like a trapdoor winning freedom to frightened Isabella in Manfred's castle, there are a few sanctuaries in this cursed city granting a morsel of autonomy and felicity for startled protagonists in Zafón's story. The city of "the invisible tales of its spirits and unspoken curses" (Zafón 2012: 287) cannot be totally unmerciful to its despondent inhabitants. Young people, belonging to the Chowbar Society, the secret club of seven teenagers living at St Patrick's Orphanage, find their refuge in "an abandoned mansion – a large rambling ruin" (Zafón 2012: 1) they christened the Midnight Palace. It is in fact the ramshackle building revealing a considerable similarity to spatial entities portrayed in the Gothic novels. The palace is, as it is held by the narrator:

a large abandoned house with a dilapidated roof through which you could see the star-studded sky. Gargoyles, columns and reliefs loomed through the sinuous shadows, the vestiges of what must once have been a stately mansion straight out of the pages of a fairy tales (Zafón 2012: 75)

This description marked with decomposition functions not only as a sort of device allowing the reader's attention to be teleported into the past (it is a ruin). It also acts as a reminder that, despite the fact that the house topographically belongs to the malignant city (like a castle or a monastery) and partakes of its nature (like the dungeon that is fundamentally a section of a castle), the palace does create an opportunity of granting the young protagonists a highly sought-after independence.

In truth, a reference to its ruinous roof, opening up a possibility of observing a star-studded sky can be interpreted not only as a symptom of freedom but also as a metaphorically constructed longing, deeply embedded in young people's psychosocial development, for trespassing imposed on limits and restrictions, a propensity enthusiastically employed by Gothic writers. Significantly, upon showing the place to Sheere, Ben, her twin brother exclaims that it is "sublime," being "oblivious to any other opinion regarding the charms of the Chowbar Society's headquarters" (Zafón 2012: 76). And only supposing the genuine meaning of Ben's exclamation, it is possible to assume that his expression takes on the Burkean meaning according to which the sublime is "associated with the infinite [the image of sky], solitude, emptiness [the palace is only a devastated building], darkness [they usually assemble there at midnight – in consideration of the hour the place takes its name] and terror" (Sikorska 2007: 300). Moreover, for Edmund Burke the sublime stands for a mixture of suffering and admiration. And this mixture of emotions likewise is perceptible in the young people's attitude towards their sanctuary, "the best place in Calcutta" (Zafón 2012: 140). They simply adore their haven of independence while experiencing an unbearable anguish of fate of destitute orphans.

The Midnight Palace is not the only place in the maze of Calcutta that is treated with esteem with regard to its features pertaining to the past, being one of the most significant characteristics of the Gothic fiction. Chandra Chatterghee Lahawaj's villa is literally soaked with references to bygone centuries. The first remark appears when the young people try to enter the mansion – their entrance is hindered by the lock that can only be open with a special key made up of letters. The words, changed consecutively, are Dido – the name of a mythological Phoenician queen who threw herself on a funeral pyre to assuage the ire of the gods in Carthage – or Kali, a Hindu goddess of time and destroyer of the ego. Importantly, Kali's iconography associates her with such concepts as violence, sexuality and death, themes so closely connected with the Gothic fiction. Upon entering the house the intruders are attacked by an irresistible presence of the past, located in the main hall:

They were standing in a hall supported by thick Byzantine columns and crowned with a concave dome covered with a huge fresco. This depicted hundreds of figures from Hindu mythology [Gothic writers were immensely interested, among others, in Druidic beliefs, Celtic traditions, supernatural folktales, Norse and Icelandic sagas], forming an endless illustrated chronicle set in concentric rings around a central figure sculpted in relief on top of the painting: the goddess Kali (Zafón 2012: 176)

Additionally, on a closer inspection, the villa is indirectly compared to a castle due to the spiral staircase rising in the middle of the lantern-shaped shaft making them feel "as if they were inside a huge kaleidoscope crowned with a cathedral-like rose window that fractured the moonlight into dozens of beams – blue, scarlet, yellow, green and

amber” (Zafón 2012: 177). What is more, the mansion is encircled, as if with a moat, with “velvety mantle of murky water” (Zafón 2012: 169), stimulating the teenagers’ overheated imagination. This fortress, as it is asserted by the narrator, “seemed to possess a bewitching charm” and “the impossible jumble of styles and forms [that] had been chosen on purpose to create a harmonious whole” (Zafón 2012: 170).<sup>2</sup> Their enthrallment, however, quickly fades away when they are forced to enter the most menacing, gloomy, filthy and haunted place in Calcutta – the railway station of Jheeter’s Gate.

As is the case with a variety of buildings in this obnoxious city the station was once one of the most magnificent edifices. It was “a landmark in steel construction, a labyrinth of tunnels” (Zafón 2012: 65) that, following a tremendous fire, turned into a “desolate swamp of poverty and filth” (Zafón 2012: 86), “the monumental carcass” (Zafón 2012: 140), and “a grandiose mausoleum” (Zafón 2012: 141). Threateningly, its “ghostly angular structure” (Zafón 2012: 140) resembling “the crest of a sleeping dragon” (Zafón 2012: 183) is frequently wrapped in mist due to close proximity to river. Due to its gargantuan dimensions it sends out an ominous echo and is shrouded in mystery. However, the most baleful feature of this place is its strong similarity to Hell “carrying the stench of burnt wood and filth” (Zafón 2012: 184) with Jawahal, the tormented soul of the engineer as its master, the personification of Satan. The “black mouths of the tunnels” (Zafón 2012: 144) closely reminiscent of subterranean passages of the sepulchre in *The Monk*, covered with drawings as if in a cave, depicting “deformed human shapes, demonic figures with long wolfish claws and eyes that popped out of their heads” (Zafón 2012: 148) comprise the headquarters of the sinister ghost animated by hatred, cunning, revenge and evil. Additionally, an inflated pride of a spectre is symbolically hinted by a means of an enormous glass dome covering an immensity of the station that “seemed to rise towards the sky, spiralling into a vault of steel and glass that merged into the clouds above” (Zafón 2012: 244), bearing an exceptionally close affinity with the Tower of Babel, the construction of which is generally perceived as a hubristic act of rebelliousness against God.

At the end of this section it is of significance to highlight one important fact. Apart from its labyrinth-like and mazy nature, the city of Calcutta along with its spatial entities discloses one fundamental and common feature. With a persistent determination they are all perceived as being almost constantly wrapped in a complete darkness; gloom that a reader can in some measure read out as a visualisation of the ghost’s iniquity and terror. What is more, as it is put by Abigail Lee Six, darkness of the Gothic fiction is “an emblematic characteristic of the mode, since it counters the light images associated with the eighteenth century as the age of reason and enlightenment” (Six 2006: 75). Functioning thus as a cover for the supernatural phenomena revolving around the spectre and its terrorising activity, darkness miasmatically permeates all possible sections of the setting, enhancing mysteriousness of the city. In truth, all places the young people visit are stigmatised with murkiness. It plays its threatening role from the beginning up to the very end of the story when,

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2 In truth, the engineer’s villa bears some resemblance to Horace Walpole’s estate on the Thames near London, Strawberry Hill, Twickenham. Like Lahawaj’s mansion, the house of the author of *The Castle of Otranto* constituted the gargantuan mixture of architectural styles. It looked like a mixture of church, castle and monastery.

upon the spectre's willing plunge into perdition, the group of teenagers spellboundly observes like gradually "the day pushed away the darkness of the night without the end" (Zafón 2012: 283). That night had its symbolic inauguration at the moment of the train fire being in fact "a sign that perpetual darkness was descending over Calcutta" (Zafón 2012: 65).

## **The Supernatural and Terror**

The truth is that, apart from the settings such as castles, graveyards and ruins, disclosing an enthrallment with the past, the intention of the Gothic writers focused upon the presentation of the supernatural and the macabre as an integral constituent of the narrative dynamic. The analysed settings were designed to evoke feelings of the unknown, the mysterious, the fearful and the sublime in accordance with the philosophical notions suggested by Edmund Burke. In his treatise *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* published in 1757, Burke asserted that the sublime, in contrast to the beautiful, was connected with such notions as immeasurability, isolation, obscurity and fright as well as with silence, disorder and distress. Significantly, the sublime is strictly connected with pleasure that arouses when one observes dreadful events which are of no direct menace to themselves. Whatever is capable of exciting in one's imagination the concept of danger, suffering and terror is, in fact, the source of the sublime. Hence, the supernatural being evoking the above-mentioned emotions and realities materialises as the key attribute of the Gothic fiction. As a progeny of the Gothic classics, Zafón's novel does possess such a phantasmatically ominous figure instilling fear, wreaking mayhem and destruction.

In *The Midnight Palace* the ghost, Jawahal, reveals its pernicious presence from the beginning up to the end of the story. It constitutes an intrinsic section of the narrative permeating and shaping almost every episode. The spectre is shown as exerting a compelling influence upon everyone, instilling a universal emotion of terror and apprehension. Like the Miltonian Satan in *Paradise Lost*, it is the omnipresent character whose degradation or rather negative development is structured as a series of transformations from a man-like figure depicted at the inception of the story up to a downright visualisation of spectre constantly encircled with an annihilating power of fire. Thus, in the first chapters the reader encounters "a dark figure wrapped in a black cloak" (Zafón 2012: 8), "the slender figure, whose face was hidden under a black hood" (Zafón 2012: 16) or the person whose "head was wrapped in a turban, which was pinned with a dark brooch shaped like a snake" (Zafón 2012: 28). Whereas in the midst of the concluding events the reader has an opportunity of observing "the grim apparition" (Zafón 2012: 255), "the lifeless shadow" (Zafón 2012: 256), "the shadow of a dead soul," and just "nothing" (Zafón 2012: 280). Nevertheless, as the story is being gradually unfolded and Jawahal's degradation progresses reducing him to almost emptiness, its powerfulness, surprisingly enough seems to massively expand.

One of the remarks suggesting his invincibility and ghostliness is made in the first chapter of the story depicting Jawahal's fight (taking place 16 years prior to the action proper) with lieutenant Peake who tries to save newborn babies – Ben and Sheere. The narrator relates the struggle as follows:

In an instant that seemed endless, Peake watched as the bullet pierced Jawahal's skull, tearing the hood off his head. For a few seconds light passed through the wound but gradually the smoking hole closed in on itself. Peake felt the revolver slipping from his fingers. The blazing eyes of his opponent fixed themselves on his and along black tongue flicked across the man's lips (Zafón 2012: 19)

adding a few lines later an ominous pronouncement indicating pride mixed with haughtiness and a belief in one's immortality: "The future is mine" (Zafón 2012: 20).<sup>3</sup> Another example of the spectre's forcefulness is worth being cited here:

Jawahal plucked a broken wineglass from the floor, put his fingers round it and squeezed hard. It melted in his fist, dripping through his fingers in globules of liquid glass that fell onto the carriage floor, creating a blazing mirror among the debris. Jawahal let go of Sheere and she fell only centimetres away from the smoking mirror (Zafón 2012: 234)

His powerfulness, however, is not only limited to a physical aspect. The spectre, whose mesmerising eyes constitute one element in the spectrum of his swaying influence upon others, is endowed with the gift of clairvoyance and is capable of predicting future events, allowing the reader to distinguish him as belonging more to the spiritual world, rather than the physical world.

What is more, his phantasmal character is hinted by means of his ability to assume a variety of different forms. As it is, for instance, the moment he flees Thomas Carter's office when he takes the shape of a huge bat, showing a marked similarity with Bram Stoker's Count Dracula or the figure of mud chasing terrified teenagers at the deserted railway station. However, his preference seems to be for everything that is connected with a figure of snake (he smiles like a cobra and uses the sinuous body of an asp as a part of his sinister game with the teenagers towards the end of the story) allowing himself to be recognised as one of the personifications, or rather disciples of biblical Satan, the first Tempter assuming the shape of a serpent while seducing Adam and Eve.

Therefore, as it seems, this herculean phantom whose "silhouette transformed into a whirlwind of fire that shot across the station at prodigious speed before diving into the tunnels, leaving a garland of flames in its wake" (Zafón 2012: 259), possesses all required attributes that can render him a genuine Gothic supernatural being, belonging to a long line of spectres haunting not only the spatial entities but also

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<sup>3</sup> Perceived in that light, Zafón's spectre resembles the one sketched by Dacre Stoker and Ian Holt in their book entitled *Dracula: The Un-Dead*. Analogously to Jawahal and his hatred mixed with a desire for vengeance, the spectre of Countess Bathory, constantly instilling terror and fear, questions: "Did I not deserve revenge?" and she quickly answers herself: "Well, I have it now. God has no place in the world I will create" (2009: 374). Like Zafón's ghost, she has become "a nocturnal predator" (2009: 375) that, if unopposed is capable of overseeing the end of mankind. What is more, those two powerful spectres share the capacity of assuming a wealth of different shapes. The Countess Bathory can transform herself, for instance, into the "monster," the "gargoyle [...] exposing gory rows of sharp teeth, and [...] glowing red eyes" (2009: 311).

people's lives. And like the Bleeding Nun dressed in a habit stained with blood regularly visiting (every five years on 5<sup>th</sup> of May) the castle of Lindenberg in Lewis' *The Monk* from whom people flee in terror, everyone in Zafón's story strives to avoid a creeping presence of the ghost. His desire to annihilate and fulfil his uncanny objective, however, is so burning that he comes into contact with everyone, bringing fear and wreaking destruction, the turmoil being in essence a physical projection of demon's tormented soul – "Like me, your mother's blood can find no rest" (Zafón 2012: 255), avows a shadow of Lahawaj to his son, Ben.

Barbarously murdered Ben and Sheere's mother, Kylian, likewise belongs to the supernatural matrix the reader can find in the story. Her nature, however, is completely different from her husband's. She is the Princess of Light who, like demon Lahawaj haunts both places and protagonists' imagination but, dissimilar to him, she is delicate, instilling the emotions of motherly love, pity and compassion. This is chiefly what makes Kylian different from her husband. Suffering from insomnia, Ian's account of her nocturnal visits is worth being cited fully:

It was there, in that soulless dormitory, that night after night I thought I saw a pale light crossing the room. Not knowing how to react, I would try to sit up and follow the reflection until it reached the other end, and in that moment I would look at it again, just as I had dreamed I would look at it on so many other occasions. The evanescent silhouette of a woman swathed in spectral light slowly bent over the bed in which Ben was sleeping. Each time, I struggled to keep my eyes open and thought I could see the lady stroking my friend's face in a maternal way. I gazed at her translucent oval face surrounded by a halo of diaphanous light. The lady would raise her eyes and look at me. Far from being frightened, I embraced her sad wounded look. The Princess of Light would then smile at me and, after stroking Ben's face one more time, would dissolve into the night like a silver mist (Zafón 2012: 44)

Functioning like a clear antitype to the demonic ghost, the spectre of Kylian strives to assuage the atrocious activity inflicted by her revengeful husband. As Lahawaj's malignity is displayed as a fathomless black hole sucking whatever it encounters upon it way, Kylian's benignity is to the same extent immeasurable, as it is implied not only by her nocturnal visitations, but rather by her eager participation in her husband's damnation in flames:

At that moment, for a fleeting second, the boy felt the presence of another face – a face wreathed in a veil of light. As the river of flames spread towards his father, those other deep sad eyes looked at him for the last time. Ben thought his mind was playing tricks on him when he recognised the same wounded look as he'd seen in Sheere's eyes. Then the Prince of Light was engulfed forever by the flames, her hand raised and a faint smile on her lips, without Ben ever suspecting who it was that had just disappeared into the fire (Zafón 2012: 281)

In truth, flames that symbolically indicate the demon's passions and crimes are intrinsically associated with a horrendous accident that befell the train packed with three hundred and sixty-five orphans. The train was chartered to mark the occasion of the official opening of Jheeter's Gate and during the journey a terrible blaze swept through all levels of the station transforming the means of transport into "a rolling

inferno, a molten tomb for the children” (Zafón 2012: 127). Significantly, beginning from this moment this “skeleton of a giant mechanical snake” (Zafón 2012: 259) creeps its way onto the stage as one more example of the supernatural in Zafón’s novel.

Analogously to the demon’s insidious and perpetual presence in the narrative of the story, a menacing apparition of the train torments imagination of protagonists. As a miasmatic phantom, its existence is indicated from the beginning up to end of the novel, invariably accompanying its master and creator, the sinister demon Jawahal. Importantly, apart from being observed, the train is, adding thus a new dimension to its supernaturalism, vividly heard, despite the fact that the last time its whistle was sounded was years ago and it is thought to be stranded somewhere deep in the shadows of the seemingly abandoned station. The first person to hear the apparition was lieutenant Peake who, having been caught and strangled by Jahawal, heard “the sound of that accursed train and the ghostly voices of hundreds of children howling from the flames” (Zafón 2012: 21). After that, the demon-like train is heard a few times by the teenagers, always while encountering the threatening presence of the ghost. Ben, for instance, has a chance to observe as “out of the mist came the furious roar of a huge steel machine that made the earth tremble beneath his feet” (Zafón 2012: 87), he also notices as “the crazed locomotive, cloaked in a tornado of flames, crashed into the wall” and immediately “changed into an apparition of eerie lights” and “like a shadowy serpent” (Zafón 2012: 88) disintegrated into the thin air. Michael, too, finds an opportunity to look at the train, but to its sheer physical form he adds the observation about its living-dead cargo: it was “swathed in flames and hundreds of ghostly faces peered through the carriage windows, their arms outstretched, howling amid the blaze” (Zafón 2012: 114). From that moment onwards those two features of the grim train – its spectral appearance and trapped in it dead children howling in terror – will be accentuated all the time up to its final moment when its master eventually lets go of his revenge and accepts his perdition: “The train leaped into the void, a snake of steel and flames crashing into the black waters of the Hooghly. A thunderous blast shook the skies over the Calcutta and beneath the city the ground trembled” (Zafón 2012: 282), concludes the narrator.

Having analysed some instances of the supernatural as a defining feature of the Gothic in the narrative context of Zafón’s novel, it is of necessity to focus our attention upon terror perceived as its attendant device. And once more it is advisable to look at the classic Gothic story in order to juxtapose its presentation of terror with the material presented in *The Midnight Palace*. In chapter VI of volume II of Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho: A Romance* the reader observes as Emily undergoes a highly traumatic experience of being visited by someone or something supernatural. The passage is longish, that is why I will indicate only the most significant elements:

A return of the noise again disturbed her; [...]. Her heart became faint with terror. Half raising herself from the bed, and gently drawing aside the curtain, she looked towards the door of the stair-case, but the lamp, that burnt on the hearth, spread so feeble a light [...] that the remote parts of it were lost in shadow. [...]. While Emily kept her eyes fixed on the spot, she [...] perceived something enter the room, but the extreme duskiness prevented her distinguishing what it was. Almost fainting with terror, she [...] continued to observe in silence the motions of the mysterious form she saw. It

seemed to glide along the remote obscurity of the apartment [...] she perceived [...] what appeared to be a human figure. [...] she continued, however, to watch the figure, [...] terror, however, had now deprived her of the power of discrimination, as well as of that of utterance (Zafón 2012: 247)

The above-mentioned quote seems to incorporate all constituents for the sort of terror that is presented in the narrative framework of Zafón's novel. This type of affright is evoked by means of the following configuration: noise – darkness – night – the setting (usually of prison-like character) – silence – a mysterious figure – a supernatural event – a logical and verbal paralysation.

The first one to be filled with this type of terror is lieutenant Peake who strives to flee his pursuers hired by Jawahal. He is craftily embedded into this configuration. After having heard the noise made by an approaching assassin the policeman hides in the shadows of an abandoned warehouse and in a complete silence waits for his death: “for a split second he thought that the smell of his fear alone would lead the killer to his hiding place” (Zafón 2012: 11), asserts the narrator. He is, however, granted with the possibility of escaping. He takes flight into the night but is quickly caught. Impressively analogous to petrified Ambrosio in *The Monk* who, frightened “at an apparition so different from what he had expected, [...] remained gazing upon the fiend, deprived of the power of utterance” (Lewis 2009: 317), lieutenant Peake dumb with terror closed his eyes and heard “the sound of that accursed train and the ghostly voices of hundreds of children howling from the flames. After that, only darkness” (Zafón 2012: 21).

Ben's experience of fear is even more analogous to Emily's. Upon hearing “a strange sound that seemed to be whistling through the leaves of the courtyard garden” he “pulled back his sheets and walked slowly towards the window.” He then listened to the same sonic phenomenon made by the apparition of the train and leaning his forehead against the windowpane “he could make out the silhouette of a slender figure standing in the middle of the courtyard, wrapped in a black cloak.” As the figure was gaping at him, he “jumped back in alarm [...]. The hairs on the back of Ben's neck stood on end and his breathing quickened” (Zafón 2012: 85). Like hypnotised Emily, he continued observing the figure and like her, he is portrayed while being “gripped by the vision” (Zafón 2012: 86), striking terror into his heart and depriving him of the power of speech and a logical thinking.

Isobel's fright – assuming the role of an innocent girl locked in the tower of a castle – is even more intense and menacing on account of the fact that to its psychological aspect, morbid Jawahal adds the type of terror associated with incarceration. After having been subliminally tempted, despite her logical reckoning, she enters the precincts of the Jheeter's Gate station completely alone. And, again, she becomes a hypnotised victim to an auditory experience of howling voices of burnt children travelling by the haunted means of transport; the occurrence precedes her being snatched by her captor, “a ghostly silhouette advancing towards her through the mist” (Zafón 2012: 149).

Ben's twin sister, Sheere, however, is this figure who undergoes the most extreme phase of terror and distress. Upon her the greatest intensity of Jawahal's temptation and focus is placed since his innermost desire is to possess her body in order to find home for his tormented soul. His entire criminality is channelled into his

yearning to “be reincarnated in a being of flesh and blood” (Zafón 2012: 269). Hence, adding a totally new dimension to her terror – she has already heard the train and its shrieking cargo, observed the sinister figure of the ghost, and she is incarcerated – Sheere is confronted with the spectre ‘face to face.’ As the narrator laconically puts it, her “heart skipped a beat as the figure came within a breath of her face” (Zafón 2012: 232) striking her with horror as his hand was getting closer to her face. However, apart from emotions brimming with horror and fear, this passage is also very intriguing on yet another ground. It is the first episode, out of two in the whole story that clearly testifies that this personification of fright, revenge, hatred and evil is capable of expressing positive reactions.<sup>4</sup> It is the episode that is similar to the scene the reader can find in John Milton’s epic *Paradise Lost* presenting Satan instantly stupefied while observing gorgeous Eve wandering alone in the Garden of Eden.<sup>5</sup> Zafón shows the episode of the ghost’s stupefaction as follows:

His long fingers, protected by a black glove, stroked her cheek and delicately pushed away a lock of hair that had fallen over her forehead. Her captor’s eyes seemed to turn pale for an instant.

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4 The ghost Jawahal, whose name can be read as an inverted version of Lahawaj’s name, and who functions in the narrative as his doppelgänger (the same motif appears in another novel by Zafón – *The Watcher in the Shadows*), is a tormented soul of the man whose iniquity and revenge was instigated by even more wicked and arrogant person, Colonel Arthur Llewelyn, bearing a close resemblance to the Conradian embodiment of evil, Kurtz from *Heart of Darkness*. Like Kurtz’s, Llewelyn’s “meteoric career [was] built on his exploits and the slaughter of innocent people – old and young, unarmed men and terrified women – in towns and villages throughout the whole Bengali Peninsula,” asserts the narrator (Zafón 2012: 209). And it is this madman whose criminality – “on the night Lahawaj [...] watched his wife being murdered before his very eyes the years of childhood horror turned on him, catapulting him straight back into his own private hell” (Zafón 2012: 215) – pushes the renowned engineer into the complete hatred and evil that was successfully hindered by his wife’s love, kindness and compassion.

5 The Miltonian presentation of stupefied Satan in the Garden of Eden can be found in the Book IX:

She most, and in her looks sums all delight:  
Such pleasure took the Serpent to behold  
This flowery plat, the sweet recess of Eve  
Thus early, thus alone; her heavenly form  
Angelic, but more soft and feminine,  
Her graceful innocence, her every air  
Of gesture or least action, overawed  
His malice, and with rapine sweet bereaved  
His fierceness of the fierce intent it brought.  
That space the Evil One abstracted stood  
From his own evil, and for the time remained  
Stupidly good, of enmity disarmed,  
Of guile, of hate, of envy, of revenge.  
But the hot hell that always in him burns,  
Though in mid Heaven, soon ended his delight (Milton 1996: IX. 454-68)

‘You look so much like her’

Abruptly the hand withered like a frightened animal, and Jawahal stood up. Sheere noticed that the chains at her back were loosening and suddenly her hands were free (Zafón 2012: 233)

Like a genuine damsel in distress placed in a dire predicament, she is affronted with terror and distress eventually spurring her to sacrifice her life – shattering that way the ghost’s desire for reincarnation – for her brother at a threatening game arranged for them in the dark tunnels of the station. The episode is full of pathos and stands in stark contrast to the spectre’s inveterate iniquity:

As Sheere opened her eyes she saw Ben approaching the red box, his arm outstretched. A stab of panic ripped through her body. She sat up abruptly and hurled herself towards Ben as quickly as she could – she couldn’t let her brother put his hand in that box. [...] Sheere had realised there was just one option remaining, one sole action capable of ruining the puzzle Jawahal had constructed around them. Only she could alter the course of events, doing the one thing in the universe that Jawahal had not foreseen. [...] She fixed her eyes on the eyes of the murderer and read the despairing refusal taking shape on his lips. Time seemed to stand still around her. Tenths of a second later Sheere was thrusting her hand through the opening in the scarlet box. She felt the flat close over her wrist like the petals of a poisonous flower. [...] Sheere smiled triumphantly and at some point she felt the asp strike her with its mortal kiss. The blast of poison lit up the blood running through her veins like a spark igniting a stream of petrol (Zafón 2012: 269-70)

Her terror-ridden existence is abruptly terminated but, assuming in that context a Christlike attitude of saviour, Sheere sacrifices her life knowing that she has just saved the life of her brother Ben and other members of Chowbar Society.

Apart from the analysed obvious symptoms of gothicness in *The Midnight Palace*, it is of significance to put to the fore one concept that seems to unite Zafón’s novel with the whole body of the Gothic texts. With their regard for the past and folk tradition, people of the pre-Romantic period started to strengthen their feelings of national identity suffocated by their previous infatuation with the reason and materialism. An imaginary rendering of the poems of Ossian (a legendary Celtic poet, the greatest poet of Ireland) by James Macpherson along with literary forgeries attempted by Thomas Chatterton and a publication of old ballads by Thomas Percy did facilitate the process of invigorating national poetry. In line with Sikorska, those “revisions and forgeries [...] inspired the exploration of the myths and literatures of the Norse and Celtic peoples” (Sikorska 2007: 281) allowing people to observe that their national history likewise is associated with the local folklore. This expanding attention to a mythical or distorted vision of the past (on account of their superficial knowledge they could not simply know what the genuine past looked like) is responsible for expansion of the Gothic fiction. And, significantly, the similar deception of reality can be found in Zafón’s novel. The forgery is associated with teenagers’ place of safety – the Midnight Palace – whose supernatural character is imaginary. Ian, the main narrator of the story, sincerely acknowledges that the house “was never really haunted. The rumours about its supernatural powers arose because of our subterfuge,” he then adds that Siraj, a “learned expert on Calcutta’s tales of ghosts,

apparitions and curses, hatched a convincingly sinister legend about an alleged former resident” (Zafón 2012: 38). It seems appropriate to draw a hypothesis that, like people of the pre-Romantic period searching for their national subjectivity in the unknown past, the teenagers in Zafón’s novel search for their own identity, autonomy and happiness in the deceptive fables concerning their sanctuary.

In his ground-breaking analysis of the Gothic, Bertrand Evans asserts that a classic example of the Gothic fiction is supposed to incorporate three fundamental constituents, the triad of “mystery, gloom, and terror” (Evans 1947: 29). And, concluding, it is important to assert that on the strength of the evidence presented in the article gothicness in Carlos Ruiz Zafón *The Midnight Palace* can be honestly confirmed. As the novel permeated with thrilling feelings of the supernatural, darkness and fear, it is one of the ingredients in an intricate process of the Gothic restoration at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. What emerges from the analysis is the indisputable fact that the presence of gothicness – despite the hypothesis that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Gothic fiction seemed to have perished or gone underground – is still discernible in a literary domain. It is evident in the context of this novel as a whole that the multifaceted process of assuming the raiment of Gothic, in which *The Midnight Palace* is hopefully only one element, is still thriving, constantly fulfilling a highly significant social role. As it is noticed by Jerrold E. Hogle and Andrew Smith, the Gothic has invariably been “an important, multi-layered, and profoundly symbolic scheme for dealing with Western culture’s most fundamental fears and concerns” (2009: 1). Functioning as a medium through which the oppressed and perpetually silenced anxieties and yearnings can be at length voiced, the re nascent Gothic fiction of the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century willingly takes recourse to the supernatural and captures the readers’ imagination while offering them the sublime vision of bygone centuries.

One of the explanations behind the cornucopia of examples of the novel revival of Gothic fiction (e.g., the 1990 *The Witching Hour* by Anne Rice, the 1993 *Complicity* by Iain Banks, or the 2001 *The Diary of Ellen Rimbauer: My Life at Rose Red* by Ridley Pearson) just at the turn of centuries is the fact that the last decade of the century is and has been particularly prone to catastrophic and apocalyptic moods. And just as the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century witnessed – as a reaction against social changes and revolutions – the appearance of the Gothic fiction, the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century observed the Gothic revival with its macabre stories of degeneration, it seems evident for the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to notice a new revival of Gothic, possibly perceived as a catalyst for fears accompanying the entry into the new millennium. Thus relying on the fact that anxiety is intrinsically associated with human existence, the Gothic with its recourse to the mysteriousness, the macabre, the supernatural, the villainy, the depressing setting and the sublime presentation of vigour of the past is sure to secure its longevity. Its endurance is also secured by an intermittent notion of the Faustian device showing its protagonists trespassing clearly established rules and borders.

The inherent strength of this extraordinary fictional tradition, taking its origins from Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* praised as the matrix of all subsequent Gothic narratives in the sense of its harbouring all the necessary ingredients comprising the genuine Gothic fiction, distinctly demonstrates that this sort of literary mode is unalterably modern and despite its seeming evaporation it is still alive and kicking. Hence, the Gothic distinguished by Walter Scott as “the art of exciting surprise and

horror” while trying to reach “that secret and reserved feeling of love for the marvellous and supernatural, which occupies a hidden corner in almost every one’s bosom” (Williams 2010: 63) can be straightforwardly unearthed in Zafón’s ‘sprawling’ works of fiction wherein “the narrative moves quickly and achieves moments of tension and suspense worthy of the classic Gothic stories” (Cortese 2011: 529).

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