



The Prisoner of Heaven

By Carlos Ruiz Zafon
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Questions for Discussion

1. Describe the relationship between Daniel and Fermin. What ties these men together? What do we learn about these two friends and their lives as the story unfolds?
2. At the beginning of the novel, a mysterious stranger enters Sempere & Sons and purchases the store's rare copy of *The Count of Monte Cristo*. How does this classic French tale tie into *The Prisoner of Heaven*? If you have read both books, how are they similar? Who is The Prisoner of Heaven and how did he earn this name? Is his incarceration a form of pure damnation or is there a sublime grace to it as well?
3. The stranger inscribes the book with an enigmatic message: "*For Fermin Romero de Torres, who came back from among the dead and holds the key to the future.*" What key is this message referring to? How does this inscription drive the story and where does it lead the characters?
4. Daniel makes note of Fermin's stockpile of aphorisms, such as "A good repast is like a lass in bloom: not to appreciate it is the business of fools." Look for them throughout the novel, choose a few you especially like, and then share them with your reading group. How does Fermin come by his wisdom?
5. Why does Fermin tell Daniel that he has been protecting him, "From the truth Daniel . . . from the truth?" Why does Daniel/or anyone need protection from truth? Does truth have the power to free Daniel or to imprison him in a psychological way?
6. Ruiz Zaf'n interweaves past and present to tell the story of *The Prisoner of Heaven*. How does life in 1939 Barcelona compare to that of 1957? Describe the Barcelona that Ruiz Zaf'n creates. What kind of a place is it? How is the civil war still shaping the lives of its inhabitants two decades after it began?
7. Fermin reveals to Daniel that he has been imprisoned in Montjuïc Castle. What kind of conditions do he and the other prisoners there endure? Among the prisoners he meets is the writer David Mart'n. Why is Mart'n in prison? Why are writers and intellectuals among the first casualties of a dictatorship? Other inmates say that Mart'n is mad. Is he crazy or does he use madness to survive?
8. What is David Mart'n's relationship with Mauricio Valls, the prison's governor? Compare and contrast the two men. What qualities would you ascribe to each? What happens to each of them and how are they both connected to Daniel?
9. Why does Fermin eventually go along with Mart'n's crazy escape scheme? What might have happened if he had not?
10. Fermin is rescued and nursed back to health by the invisible poor of Barcelona's shadow world. "There are times and places where not to be anyone is more honourable than someone," Ruiz Zaf'n writes. What is the meaning of his words and how does it relate to the "time and place" brought to life in the novel? Is it better to fight or to give in to what Daniel calls "the convenient cowardice of survivors"? What is sacrificed with each choice?
11. Daniel's friend, Professor Alburquerque, tells him, "Cities have no memory and they need someone like me, a sage with his feet on the ground, to keep it alive." Explain what he means. Why do cities have no memory? Why is it easy to forget even the most devastating of events? What happens when we do forget? Would you consider Ruiz Zaf'n to be a memory keeper like the professor?
12. When Daniel discovers a letter from his wife's old suitor in her coat pocket, should he have read it? How is Bea's former fianc' tied into the mystery of both Daniel and Fermin's past?
13. Late in the novel, Daniel and Fermin visit the Cemetery of Forgotten Books. What does Daniel find there and how does he react to his discovery? What is this repository and why is it secret? Why did the prison governor, Valls, want to learn its whereabouts? How do places such as the Cemetery of Forgotten Books exist in a brutal and dangerous world like fascist Spain?
14. What do you think comes next for Daniel and Fermin?
15. In the novel's prologue, the author writes, "*The Prisoner of Heaven* is part of a cycle of novels set in the literary universe of the Cemetery of Forgotten Books of which *The Shadow of the Wind* and *The Angel's Game* are the two first installments. Although each work within the cycle presents an independent, self-contained tale, they are all connected through characters and storylines, creating thematic and narrative links." If you have read the other two books, identify these links. How does reading this third installment shed new light on the characters and your understanding of the mysterious Cemetery of Forgotten Books?