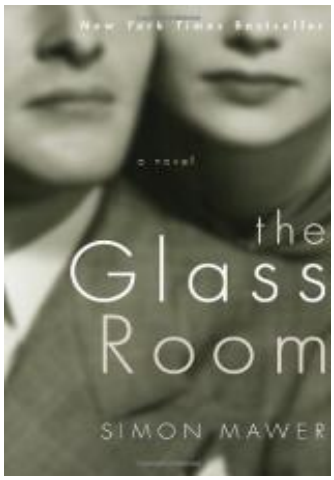
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The Glass Room

by Simon Mawer



About the Book

Honeymooners Viktor and Liesel Landauer are filled with the optimism and cultural vibrancy of central Europe of the 1920s when they meet modernist architect Rainer von Abt. He builds them a home to embody their exuberant faith in the future, and the Landauer House becomes an instant masterpiece. Viktor and Liesel, a rich Jewish mogul married to a thoughtful, modern gentile, pour all of their hopes for their marriage and budding family into the stunning new home, filling it with children, friends, and a generation of artists and thinkers eager to abandon old-world European style in favor of the new and the avant-garde. But as life intervenes, their new home also brings out their most passionate desires and darkest secrets. As Viktor searches for a warmer, less challenging comfort in the arms of another woman, and Liesel turns to her wild, mischievous friend Hana for excitement, the marriage begins to show signs of strain. The radiant honesty and idealism of 1930 quickly evaporate beneath the storm clouds of World War II. As Nazi troops enter the country, the family must leave behind their old life and attempt to escape to America before Viktor's Jewish roots draw Nazi attention, and before the family itself dissolves.

As the Landauers struggle for survival abroad, their home slips from hand to hand, from Czech to Nazi to Soviet possession and finally back to the Czechoslovak state, with new inhabitants always falling under the fervent and unrelenting influence of the Glass Room. Its crystalline perfection exerts a gravitational pull on those who know it, inspiring them, freeing them, calling them back, until the Landauers themselves are finally drawn home to where their story began.

Brimming with barely contained passion and cruelty, the precision of science, the wild variance of lust, the catharsis of confession, and the fear of failure - the Glass Room contains it all.

Discussion Guide

1. Why are the Landauers so devoted to modernity? What makes them so intent on shedding the past, and how is this

tied to their country?s history or future?

2. What was your first impression of Rainer von Abt? What did you think of his minimalist approach? Why do you think it appealed to Liesel and Viktor?

3. The characters are constantly fluctuating between languages --- specifically German and Czech. How do these characters use or manipulate language to express themselves?

4. During the housewarming party at the Glass Room, von Abt speaks of his masterpiece, saying, ?A work of art like this demands that the life lived in it be a work of art as well.? Do you think this prophecy comes to fruition?

5. Why does Viktor initially approach Kata in Vienna? What is he looking for in her? How is she different from Liesel?

6. The Glass Room takes on many personas throughout the book, moving from a home to a laboratory to a gymnasium to a museum. Does the original concept of the house remain intact through all of its internal transformations? Does the house ever become part of the past?

7. Do you believe that Viktor is in love with both Liesel and Kata? Does he fall for Kata before or after she comes to live with the family? What does the scene at the train station reveal about both him and Liesel?

8. Coincidence plays an important role in the novel. Does the Glass Room encourage it? If so, how?

9. Why do you think Hana agrees to be examined by Stahl and his crew? Why do you think the house is seen as an ideal place for a scientific laboratory?

10. What image or scene within the novel haunted or stayed with you the most?

11. Tomá?, much like Viktor, is always looking toward the future. But with yet another love triangle in the Glass Room --- this time between Zdenka, Tomá?, and Eve --- do things really change in this society obsessed with the future? Can history be erased if it is constantly being repeated?

12. What is Hana searching for in all of her love affairs? Do you think she is truly in love with Zdenka? Is it the Glass Room?s influence or is Zdenka just a replacement for Liesel?

13. When Hana and Liesel are reunited at the novel?s end, both women gloss over the tragedies in their past. Why do you think they hold back?

14. Does **The Glass Room** tell the story of a house or a family? What story do you think Mawer set out to tell?

15. Mawer constantly shifts the perspective from character to character, often leaving the reader wanting more. Which character?s outcome or emotions did you wish you knew more about by the novel?s end --- Katalin?s? Von Abt?s? Viktor?s? Stahl?s? Oskar?s?

16. Why do you think Mawer chose to conclude the book with Ottilie and Maria reuniting? What, if anything, does this new generation represent?

Author Bio

Simon Mawer was born in 1948 in England. His first novel, CHIMERA, won the McKitterick Prize for first novels in 1989. MENDEL'S DWARF (1997), his first book to be published in the U.S., was long-listed for the Man Booker Prize and was a *New York Times* Book to Remember for 1998. THE GOSPEL OF JUDAS, THE FALL (winner of the 2003 Boardman Tasker Prize for Mountain Literature) and SWIMMING TO ITHACA followed, as well as THE GLASS ROOM, his 10th book and eighth novel, which was short-listed for the Booker Prize. TRAPEZE was published in 2012 and its follow-up, TIGHTROPE, in 2015.

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