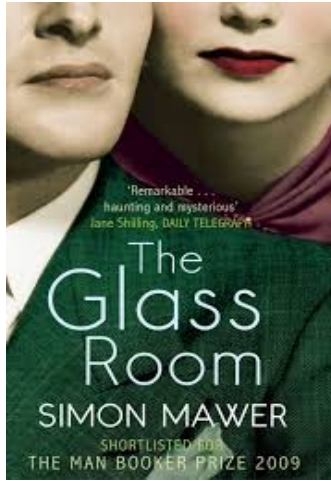


Simon Mawer



Alix

I thoroughly enjoyed *The Girl who fell from the Sky*. Learning about the Czechs and the Jewish people and what they went through. The intrigues with Viktor and Liesel, his wife, and two children and his mistress, Kata and her daughter and how they all lived together. Also the lesbian element with Liesel and Hanna.

Viktor, Hanna and Oskah, her husband, are Jews and Hanna and Oskah are sent into Camps. It is sad that Hanna was pregnant and the baby was taken from her. Oskah died but the others survived. Viktor and his family went to America but he died. Liesel and her daughter and son came over to see the Glass Room and met Hanna again.

Hanna is friendly with another young woman but who knows, now that she has met Liesel again, whether she will pursue this relationship.

Angela

The Glass Room is an interesting book. Nominally set around the Second World War it actually covers a wide time period from the 1930's on and is unusual in being written, in a sense, from the perspective of an extraordinary house. The glass room is the living area of the cutting edge modern home built for the Landauer couple early in their marriage and this book tells its story from its conception, through its life as it passes from owner to owner through the war and beyond. Initially I found it quite difficult to get into the swing of the book as I found the initial focus on the house a little bare and soulless. Later as the human characters and their relationships developed it became more interesting. I thought some aspects of the plot were less than credible and outcomes were often rather too neat. And nearly all the characters seemed to be in overly involved sexual relationships. For me the sex was somewhat overdone and left little to the imagination, which was a shame, given that Mawer was very clever in making the atmosphere quite electrically voyeuristic at times. However, the descriptions of the room built up its aura

beautifully and made it seem quite magical. The way the author brought the surroundings and weather into the room to form the mood were very skilfully written. There was a lot in this book, covering all sorts of personal, political, racial and social issues of the time, with much food for thought. Also twists in plot kept it interesting and overall I was glad I persisted in reading through to the end.

Angie

The Girl who fell from the Sky is a fictional portrayal of the remarkable heroism shown by the women of the Special Operations Executive (SOE) who were deployed in France during the Second World War. Fluent in English and French and with a great love of France Marian Sutro is serving in the WAAF when she comes to the attention of the SOE who are searching for suitable candidates to train as special operatives for deployment in France.

“She’s sitting in the fuselage, trussed like a piece of baggage, battered by noise. Half an hour earlier they manhandled her up through the door because she was too encumbered with her parachute to climb the ladder unassisted; now she is just there, with the sound drumming on her ears, and the inadequate light and the hard metal packages all around her.” This first paragraph gripped my imagination and encouraged me to carry on reading thinking the story would keep me enthralled all the way through. However, I found the next section of the book describing the recruitment of Marian Sutro and her subsequent training in Scotland did not hold my attention in the same way. It wasn’t until Marian arrived in France and began her deployment as a special operative that the pace picked up. The tension increased even more when Marian arrived in war torn Paris. From then on the portrayal of her bravery and her determination to complete her mission while experiencing loneliness and fear was excellent. Marian’s subsequent betrayal by someone she had trained with and initially trusted had a ring of truth about it.

Ann

The Glass Room by Simon Mawer, is set in Czechoslovakia just before World War 2. Viktor, a non-practising Jew, and Liesel a nominal Christian, marry with high ideals for a new life in a new style modern home, away from the history and architecture of the past. The house reflects their ideals and ambitions for a new life, which they find hard to achieve and when the Nazis invade, they are forced to flee to America. Their friends and colleagues are left behind to suffer under the Germans.

The ‘house’ is left to become a horrible genetic investigative laboratory under the Germans and subsequently under the Russians takeover, it becomes a gymnasium and then a museum.

It is not a book I enjoyed, although it made me think about a lot of issues. Probably it is more for younger people, who haven’t lived through the Second World War and all the stories heard about it since then. There were a lot of sex scenes in this book, which I didn’t think added to the emotional happiness of any of the characters.

Chris

The Girl who fell out of the Sky

Marian Sutro is a 19-year-old WAF recruited and trained by the British Special Operations Executive to literally drop into France to aid the French Resistance. This book seems to be in two halves, the first half in England where she seems to rather drift through her rather rigorous training in a pretty dismissive way, not knowing what she is expected to do, seemingly rather vacuous and we hear little of the war. This part of the book I found rather dragged. However it becomes clear her French bilingual skills and background are to be needed to stay under cover while she is to be used by the SOE to persuade an old friend of her brother (both being experts in physics) to come to England to help develop nuclear weapons. My interest in her story really only took off when she got to France. The descriptions of fear, exhaustion, intimidation and violence bring to life the oppressive wartime atmosphere and the bravery of those fighting the Occupation. Her character develops with each frightening step. Marian's old friend had been a mad crush for her at a young age and the mission brought them close again in Paris, and yet she realised she had outgrown the love she felt for him (who was by now married with a child) even though he returned her love. She delivers him to the airlift and the sudden end when she decides to stay behind to fight and is almost immediately arrested is heart wrenching. A good read in the end.

Doreen

The Girl who fell out of the Sky

A few years ago, I went on a French tour following in the footsteps the WW2 Resistance. With the exception of Ravensbruck, I visited several places frequented by Violette Szabo and became very aware of the dangers facing SOE officers. Unlike the military, they had no protection if captured and a life expectancy of less than three months. The very word Gestapo chilled the blood.

With this in mind, I found the beginning of the book less than convincing. Marian Sutton did not impress me as suitable SOE material. She signed the Official Secrets pledge and was warned against revealing anything about her forthcoming mission -- yet she confided all she knew to her brother the minute she met him ! Moreover, female agents needed to become invisible, dull and uninteresting to avoid any unwelcome attention, but this did not apply to Marian. Men noticed her. She was very attractive and used to wearing expensive clothes. However, once the story moved to France, my attention and interest became more focused. The various characters had their own distinctive personalities and Le Patron, in particular, was portrayed with uncanny accuracy. Sutro's escapades and escapes were full of realistic tension and nail-biting excitement although I found the conclusion of the story quite predictable unlike that of a similar book I read called Code Name Verity by Elizabeth Wein. The ending in that book caught me unaware in its surprise and I preferred it to *The Girl who fell out of the Sky*.

Gill

The Glass Room

I found it quite difficult to get involved in this book but once I had, I thought it was an unusual, creative story, based as it was on a specific house. I like the idea of a modernist glass room/space, though not sure I'd like to live in one. The main characters are part of a wealthy middle/upper class Czech society who are able to escape Nazi Europe; as Lanik says (in the chapter 'Soviets') "They're rich things. Rich enough to get out, rich enough to get to

somewhere safe". I wondered if this is why I found that the atmosphere of invasion and panic was a bit understated. To an extent, apart from Kata, the family appears fairly protected. On the other hand, perhaps this understatement is just part of the author's reserved mode of writing. I think the story shows, not just a house changing owners and residents, but also countries. As someone who's lived in The UK (and Australia for 7 years) I find the notion of moving, changing borders in continental Europe quite alien and unsettling. Overall, I am not sure what I thought of this book or whether I would read more of the author's work - perhaps.

Jean

The Glass Room

Viktor felt that the world was moving on. He didn't want a Gothic style house with turrets and towers, but a house that reflected the C20, not the C14. He wanted to break away from the European wealthy. He and the architect, Von Apt, wished to take man out of the cave -to build a house to adapt to the future rather than the secret, stultified life of the previous century. They wanted to go with the spirit of the brand new country in which they found themselves, where being Czech, German, or Jew wouldn't matter; a country in which democracy would prevail and art and science combine to bring happiness to all people. Sadly, all this became an illusion as the novel reveals.

A few comments on some of the other questions about the book:

Viktor is bereft when separated from Kata at the Spanish border. His reaction shows that he has stronger feelings for Kata than for Liesel.

The Glass Room is seen as an ideal place for a scientific laboratory as it has a clinical atmosphere with lots of light shining on everything.

I don't think that history can be erased. It drags itself into the future, albeit in a different guise. Yes, Zdenka is a replacement for Liesel, although the Glass Room also has some influence on Hana.

Hana and Liesel gloss over the tragedies of the past. They hold back because they want to shut out the past while retaining their affection for each other. They don't want to taint the beauty of their special relationship.

I felt that the reunion of Ottilie and Marika was somewhat contrived and that the writer wanted to tidy up loose ends.

But, on the positive side, it emphasises the agelessness of the Glass Room, shrunk now in size as Marika remembers it, so, yes, perhaps this is the purpose for the reunion - - -.

Margaret

The Glass Room

This is a beautifully well told and gripping story about the house with the glass room, designed for Viktor and Liesel Landauer, and those connected with it. For its exceptional descriptions I think this novel is one of the best I have read in a long time, although I can't say that I particularly liked any of the characters.

The sound of the wind in the trees is a sea sound and the house itself is a ship pitching out into choppy waters of the city...

also the description of their flight and the aeroplane

The cabin is flooded with noise, like the inside of a drum when the drummer beats a military roll.

When Viktor and his family have to flee when war breaks out, because Viktor is Jewish, the tension builds up and the horrors of WWII and the plight of the Jews are highlighted. The number of love triangles are perhaps overdone but I became really gripped with the book, a definite page turner. At the end there was the meeting up between Otilie (Liesel's daughter) and Marika, (Kata's daughter) giving it a positive end.

Margaret

The Girl who fell from the sky

Not only is bilingual Marian Sutro (French and English) working in the Fighter Command headquarters, asked if she would be willing to become a Resistance fighter, but also an affiliated government department is also interested in using her to lure a physicist she once knew, Clément Pelletier, from Paris to Britain. After rigorous training in England and Scotland before landing in France, she proved that she was made of far sterner stuff than we had imagined the girl we were first introduced to would be. Mawer describes in great detail the risks she has been forced to take as well as about the two loves of her life; Clément Pelletier and Benoit, who she met whilst training. One thing she had learnt though was to trust nobody so after all she had been through the end was rather an unpleasant surprise in that she was betrayed. The novel was a brave attempt by Mawer to do what other authors have done before, such as in *Charlotte Gray* by Sebastian Faulks. I liked the characters more in *The Girl who fell from the sky* than those in *The Glass Room*.

Sharon

The Girl who fell from the Sky

Marion was obviously a good choice for the role of an agent as a middle class ordinary young woman with her French and English culture and language mix. The character was well developed as the book progressed and I learnt more about what some of these women did. I also found the science element interesting and the idea that the development of the A bomb could stop it all. Some sections built excitement and anxiety, eg the chase through Paris, but there was a little disappointment at the ending when Marion decided to stay behind and carry on with her work. I wanted to know what happened next (the mark of a good book I suppose).

Stephanie

The Girl who fell from the Sky

This was a well written thriller and easy to read. It was set primarily in France in the 2nd world war and followed one female who was selected to work in the SOE (Special Operations Executive) in the resistance in France . It includes an interesting section on her training and then follows her life as she is transported, by air and a parachute drop, into occupied France. It clearly portrays conditions in France at the time with dreadful coffee made from chicory etc, very limited availability of food and, for resistance workers if not also the general population, constant fear of the occupying German forces. However I was frustrated by the book's concentration on the heroine, Marian Sutro and her sexual encounters and her own feelings at the expense of a broader picture of life in occupied France during those appalling years.

My comments are necessarily coloured by the book that, by pure chance, I read immediately prior to this which was a non-fiction account of a woman working in the French resistance during the war (A woman of no importance by Sonia Purnell). This painted a clear and dreadful picture of what ordinary French people, resistance workers and especially the 'pianists' (radio

operators) endured and of the awful toll inflicted on those captured by the occupiers.



For more about *The Glass Room* please see over

Some Questions and Topics for Discussion for *The Glass Room*

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 house-warming 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. Tomáš, much like Viktor, is always looking toward the future. But with yet another love triangle in the Glass Room-this time between Zdenka, Tomáš, 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 Otilie and Maria reuniting? What, if anything, does this new generation represent?