

Literature in Detail

Reading Analysis 1

Discuss both content and structure of the following excerpts:

A They climbed on sketchy ladders towards God, with winch and pulley hoisted hewn rock into heaven, inhabited sky with hammers, defied gravity, deified stone, took up God's house to meet Him. And came down to their suppers and small beer, every night sleep, lay with their smelly wives, quarrelled and cuffed the children, lied, spat, sang, were happy or unhappy.

B Shining

Steel will be as translucent as water
Light will be as solid as walls
And walls as transparent as air
I conceive of a house
That will be unlike any other
Living space that merges seamlessly
A place that is at once of nature
And quite aside from nature

What kinds of buildings are described? How are they described? What would an ideal illustration for the text look like? How is the text structured? Is it a piece of prose or poetry?

Reading Analysis 2

Read the dialogue and answer the following questions:

Who is speaking? When are they speaking? What are they speaking about? Who says what?

„See what he is suggesting? The house will be sort of hung from the first storey, here. “
„I mean, the fellow hasn't really bothered with walls. Just glass. “
„I will build you a house upside down, “that's what he said. “
„But is it what we want? “
„Why not? “ And this room, all glass! “
„We will be like plants, hothouse plants. “
„Over-hot in summer, perishing cold in winter, I'd say. “
„What's this line? “
„He proposes some kind of partition to divide the area. “
„At least there's one curve. “

Language Analysis

Insert the following author's comments into the dialogue:

1. She laughs, shifting her belly, leaning forward again.
2. His tone is one of amazement and excitement, as though he has just been the witness of a natural phenomenon, that you see only once in a lifetime.
3. And as Viktor said, the street entrance seems to be on top floor with the living room below it.
4. She examines the plan of the main floor.
5. He unfolds the architect's plan on the floor beside her desk.

Choose some of the words to describe the two characters, Liesel and Rainer, in the following excerpt:

vain well-travelled direct hesitant naive tactless polite
 easy-going unsure conservative flirtatious open-minded ironic
 diplomatic nationalistic talkative self-confident slow-thinking

A voice speaking English with German accent, but speaking it far better than she. She looked around. He was smoking, holding two glasses of champagne on one hand and his cigarette in the other. He seemed older than the Italian, as old as Viktor maybe, with the look of a boxer in the early part of his career, before he has begun to suffer much damage – bluntness to his nose, heaviness to his brow. Putting his cigarette between his lips he held out one of the glasses towards Liesel. “Have a sip of French tradition. Even the Fascist will not be able to improve on it. “

There was a swift juggling of champagne flutes. The newcomer raised Liesel’s hand to within a few millimetres of his lips. „My name is Rainer, I’m afraid. Someone has to be ...“

„Someone has to be? You mean someone in your family? It is another tradition? “

The man made a disparaging face. His hair was parted in the middle and rather long, as though, despite the well-cut suit, he wished to convey a certain bohemian look. „It was a joke, American style, “

„But you are not American. “

„I practise at their humour. One day that is all there will be to laugh at. “He sipped and looked at Liesel thoughtfully. He was shorter than her by two three inches and his eyes had an unashamed frankness about them. He examined her quite openly: her mouth (red, quaintly curved, she knew), her bosom (rather flat, she feared), her hands (rather long and strong for a woman). Had he been standing a few paces back she imagines he would have examined the line of her hips (broad) and her ankles (she was proud of her ankles). Perhaps he had already done all this before his approach, Somehow – why should she be concerned? – She wished that she was not wearing her spectacles. „And whose company do I have the pleasure of keeping? “he asked.

„Liesel Landauer’s. “

Eyebrows rose. „Landauer? You are Jewish then? “

„Not exactly. “

„Apostate? “

„My husband’s family –,

He drew on his cigarette and blew a thin stream of smoke towards the painted ceiling. “Ah, I see. You are Frau Landauer and you have trapped a Hebrew into renouncing his religion for love’s sake. “

She wasn’t sure if she quite liked this conversation, the word Hebrew pronounced with just a hint of contempt. „My husband’s family are Jewish, but they are not observant. “

„And the beautiful Frau „Liesel Landauer and her fortunate husband are from...? “

„We are Czechish. These are our“- she hesitated, the English word escaping her- „our *Flitterwochen*? “

LIESEL	RAINER

Genre Analysis

Read, compare and contrast the three excerpts:

A

The morrow brought a very sober-looking morning, the sun making only a few efforts to appear; and Catherine augured from it everything most favourable to her wishes. A bright morning so early in the year, she allowed, would generally turn to rain, but a cloudy one foretold improvement as the day advanced.

B

You might like to ask why the Sun is able to supply its own light, heat, and energy whereas the Earth and the other planets only shine feebly with the aid of borrowed light. Strange as it may seem, it is best to start this problem by considering the interior of the Earth.

C

Snow. Why did she think of snow? That particular bath of light, the sky's light reflected upwards from the blanched lawn to light the ceiling as brightly as the clouded sun lit the floor. Light become substance, soft, transparent milk.

Writing Analysis

Read the text, decide about its function and divide it into paragraphs:

Good prose, Orwell would have you believe, is like a window pane. Had Orwell been Simon Mawer he might have specified what kind of window pane he had in mind, where, when and in what lighting. *The Glass Room* is full of windows that are smeared, windows that reflect or diffuse light, that shatter. "Refraction of the daytime," as one character puts it, "become reflection of the night." Every window is a potential two-way mirror. A broken shard is a knife. The room of the novel's title – *Der Glasraum* – is the vast living room in Viktor and Liesel Landauer's modernist house, a masterpiece built for them by ascendant architect Rainer von Abt, with plate-glass walls and a partition made of pure onyx. This is Czechoslovakia between the wars, with Von Abt's iconoclastic building as a symbol of a young country in a new world, and of the wealthy Landauers' new marriage. When war comes again, Viktor, a Jew, flees with his young family. The marriage begins to fail. Civilised Europe has already failed. Miraculously, though, the Glass Room remains, repossessed by successive armies and ideologies, yet always drawing its inhabitants back and holding layers of history in its uncommon space. Mawer's technique here is a form of the historical layering that he previously plied in *Swimming to Ithaca* and *The Fall*. Five sections move the story from 1928 through Nazi occupation, Soviet control and the Prague Spring to the aftermath of the Velvet Revolution. Like the house, the novel is flawlessly constructed, revealing the careful plan of its reflections and symmetries, the lines of force hidden in its surfaces and its concealed architecture. Its only snag is that the final blueprints seem, if anything, too neatly drawn, too traditional: the book could have done without its sentimental coda. That aside, *The Glass Room*, shortlisted for last year's Booker Prize and this year's Jewish Quarterly Wingate Prize, is Mawer's finest work so far. From the materials of the house itself he draws unexpected resonances, candescent onyx balancing pellucid glass, and that glass itself shifting between aspects. When the house becomes a research outpost of Nazi racial science, we think of the test tube and the Petri dish; when a Soviet bomb shatters the room, the shard-carpeted cities of Europe come to mind. And always at the back of the mind, as the Jewish characters flee their homes, are the hideous shatterings of Kristallnacht.