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The Image of the First Czechoslovak Republic
in Simon Mawer's novel *The Glass Room*

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I hereby declare that this diploma thesis is completely my own work and that no other sources were used in the preparation of this thesis than those listed on the Works Cited page.

Abstract

The thesis provides an analysis of the First Czechoslovak Republic in Simon Mawer's novel *The Glass Room*. The first part of the thesis concentrates on Mawer's life, the beginnings of his writing career, his interest in the Czech Republic and the Villa Tugendhat which inspired him in writing the novel and also on the work's receptions. The second part focuses on history of the First Czechoslovak Republic and on an analysis of this era in Mawer's novel. It deals with Czechoslovak political, social and economic situation, Czechoslovak cultural life and art, minorities issue and growing radicalism of 1930's in *The Glass Room* and compares and contrasts it with the real Czechoslovakia.

Key Words

Simon Mawer, *The Glass Room*, the First Czechoslovak Republic, Czechoslovak society, Czech Germans, Czechoslovak culture and art

Abstrakt

Tato práce poskytuje analýzu prvorepublikového Československa v románě *The Glass Room* (*Skleněný pokoj*) od Simon Mawer. První část práce se zaměřuje na Mawerův život, začátky jeho spisovatelské kariéry, na zájem o Českou republiku a Vilu Tugendhat, která ho inspirovala k napsání románu a také na ohlasy díly. Druhá část se zaměřuje na historii prvorepublikového Československa a na analýzu této doby v Mawerově románu. Zabývá se československou politickou, sociální a ekonomickou situací, československým kulturním životem a uměním, problematikou menšin a rostoucím radikalismem třicátých let ve *Skleněném pokoji* a srovnáním a uvedením do kontrastu se skutečným Československem.

Klíčová slova

Simon Mawer, *Skleněný pokoj*, prvorepublikové Československo, československá společnost, čeští Němci, československá kultura a umění

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1 INTRODUCTION

The era of the First Czechoslovak Republic was an exceptional time in the Czechoslovak history. It was the first independent Czech state after almost a three-hundred-year dominance of the Habsburg dynasty. It was a short period of democracy and liberalism which ceased to exist due to the German occupation and totalitarianism that was installed with the Nazi coming. On the other hand, the system had to also deal with many problematic issues. It is an era which can be praised, yet also criticised, a complicated era which should not be perceived only from one point of view. The aim of this thesis derives from the desire to illustrate the First Czechoslovak Republic in the novel *The Glass Room* (2009) written by a British writer, Simon Mawer, and compares and contrasts it with the real interwar Czechoslovakia.

The main motivation and the interest of the author of this thesis in the topic result from contemporariness of the novel, its story's placement into the Czech surroundings, from special attention the Czech Republic pays to Simon Mawer and to his work and also from mainly positive receptions which the novel got. The interest in the theme, on the other hand, is also heightened by the criticism of the daughters of Fritz and Greta Tugendhat about *The Glass Room*. The descendants of the Tugendhats, the original owners of the Villa Tugendhat which became a model house for Mawer's fictional family, the Landauers, condemn the book for similarities between the life of their parents and Mawer's Landauers. The motivation for the theme also derives from the personal interest of the author of this thesis in history, society, culture and art of the interwar era and especially of the First Czechoslovak Republic.

In the first part of this thesis, its author tries to briefly portray the life of the novel's writer, Simon Mawer. The part attempts to depict his life before and after the beginning of his writing career, his discovery of the Czech Republic, Brno and the Villa Tugendhat and also his opinions on various topics, including the Czech Republic and Czechoslovakia. It tries to present the literary and critical reviews and receptions the book got. Since there is no secondary literature about Simon Mawer, no biography about his life and his works (till the date of this thesis' publication), the author of this thesis bases her research on the newspaper articles, critical and literary reviews of Mawer's works and interviews with the novelist.

The second part, the main aim of this thesis, attempts to analyse the First Czechoslovak Republic as Simon Mawer presents it in *The Glass Room*. It tries to compare and contrast the politics, the society, the economic situation, the cultural life, the Czechoslovak art and the problematic issues of that time as well as the behaviour and the opinions of the individual characters with the life and the culture in the real Czechoslovakia. The author of this thesis attempts to find out whether Mawer, as a British writer, who portrays the Czechoslovak environment in his novel – that is the surroundings which he does not come from and he has never lived in to observe attentively, at least – and a time he did not survive, is able to capture the uniqueness of the Czechoslovak atmosphere accurately. The main aim of this thesis is to analyse whether Mawer's Czechoslovakia is depicted plausibly, whether the novelist inclines to idealization or criticism of the era, also if he makes any factual errors in his work and whether he presents various perspectives on the time or if he depicts the period only from one point of view.

For the purposes of readability of this thesis, its author does not divide the second part of this work into a theoretical and practical part, but writes both in parallel, compares and contrasts the real Czechoslovak history with Mawer's Czechoslovakia in *The Glass Room* immediately and successively.

2 SIMON MAWER'S PATH TO THE GLASS ROOM

In this chapter the author of the thesis focuses on Simon Mawer's life and the crucial events that inspired and led him to become a writer. Since three of his books – two novels *Mendel's Dwarf* (1997) and *The Glass Room* (2009) and one non-fictional book *Gregor Mendel: Planting the Seeds of Genetics* (2006) – are, at least partly, set in the region of Moravia, and tell the story of the Moravian natives, the author of this thesis also gives a special attention to Mawer's discovery of and growing interest in the Czech Republic, as well as the author's admiration of the Villa Tugendhat which became a model inspiration for the most acknowledged and the most popular work he has written so far, *The Glass Room*. The last part of this chapter deals with the critical receptions of the novel.

2.1 Becoming a Writer

Simon Mawer's path to become a writer was relatively very long. He was not one of those novelists who embarked on the literary career immediately after their university studies or started as essayists in newspapers and magazines. Mawer's first novel, *Chimera*, was published in 1989, when the author was forty years old.

Simon Mawer was born in England in 1948. His father, as well as his grandfather, served in the Royal Air Force, therefore the family often moved from place to place. The early years of Mawer's life were rather chaotic. As he recalls “[w]e went from one air force station to another; my mother worked out that we'd moved something like twenty times in twenty-two years. I'm still not certain, where I come from” (Crown). Among various places in England, the family spent three years in Cyprus and five years in Malta. These stays rooted love for the Mediterranean in Mawer. Later, when he was working on the novel *Swimming to Ithaca* (2006), he used his memories and impressions of Cyprus in it.

Because the family moved so often, Mawer attended boarding schools from the early age of eight. This is how he remembers the life in boarding schools “I hated it. Though I do have a theory that boarding school is good training for writers because it's so desperately lacking in privacy; you make space for yourself by having an interior

life. Plus, the library was run by sixth-formers, and when you were in it they treated you like humans. I spent a lot of time there, reading” (Crown). As an eleven-year-old boy, he told himself he wanted to be a novelist. However, when he was about to choose his future university studies, he applied neither for literature nor language studies. As he recalls in *The Guardian* interview with Sarah Crown, he was thinking about either being a pilot after his father, or following his uncle’s footsteps and becoming a lawyer, or going to the medicine because he had been often ill. However, as the British Empire was coming to its end, the Royal Air Force had to reduce the number of pilots; therefore Mawer did not decide for the career of a pilot. In addition to that, he would not have been allowed to fly anyway, since he “suffers from migraines” (Škvovierová, translation mine). He chose medicine at Oxford, yet he lacked grades to read it and so he finally applied for biology instead.

Mawer was “a terrible student” as he nowadays comments on his Oxford years “I don’t regret studying it, but there was an awful lot of hard work required. I wasn’t interested in that” (Crown). Although writing attracted him even at Oxford, he did not dare to start with it, yet. He lacked literary training which discouraged him. Mawer recalls that “[t]here were an awful lot of people doing the Oxford thing, being playwrights and novelists at the age of twenty. You think, there’s no way I’m in that league. Later, when I did begin to write, I still felt slightly embarrassed about it, because I’m a biologist. I used to feel like I was trespassing. I don’t now. Most of those people who saw themselves as literary types at university became bank managers” (Crown). Nowadays, he really seems to feel secure about his writing career. He talks about himself as about “a writer who happened to have trained as a biologist” (Strainchamps) and considers artists who do not know any science “severely limited [since] scientists can always read novels and look at pictures and listen to music” (Strainchamps) and most of them do, yet only a few artists study chemistry, physics or biology, therefore the group of scientists can be regarded as richer according to Mawer.

After graduation, he decided to find employment in the field of his study and started his biology teacher career. Comparing his own opinion on leaving Britain for a small island to that of John Fowles’ character of Nicholas Urfe in *The Magus*, Mawer moved to Guernsey. First, he had almost romantic visions of the detached and strange island, yet after all, he describes living there as rather “intensely claustrophobic” (Crown). The cliffs and the coastal rocks on the island, however, introduced him to a

new passion for climbing that later inspired him to write the novel *The Fall* (2003). At that time, if Mawer had any desires to become a novelist, he put all those dreams aside. Climbing was everything to him for the next several years until one fateful and dramatic Sunday in January 1975.

Mawer and his friend went for climbing the Hadrian's Wall on the North-East face of Ben Nevis in Scotland. Mawer was leading on an ice route being – as he recalls – some seventy feet above his partner when suddenly the avalanche began. “At first it was a mere rivulet of ice crystals hushing down the snow field and sweeping round me... then the whole world went dark, and looking up I saw a great cloud of snow coming down on me. I remember praying. I think, I actually prayed to the avalanche itself. Please, don't knock me off, I pleaded. But the avalanche did not listen... then it flung me backwards” (Mawer). Mawer fell and ended up “hanging upside down on the rope, one hundred and fifty feet below” (Mawer) his partner. This was the moment that changed Mawer's future life. His passion for climbing suddenly cooled down and instead he started visiting his family who was then stationed in Malta. He also met there his future wife, Connie, which helped him to decide and leave Britain behind. He was not sorry to do so, he describes the 1970's Britain as “a sour, grey place... in the midst of industrial dispute and political unrest” (Mawer). Living over thirty years outside Britain changed Mawer's view of his Englishness. “Coming back... is very interesting” Mawer comments “it is completely different world. Nobody can tell I am not British, and after all it is a foreign country. It is odd to be isolated in this way, but I think for writing, it is an advantage” (Škvovierová, translation mine).

In Malta, his desire for writing renewed. He became fascinated by the Knights of Saint John, also known as the Knights of Malta, and “spent hours in the Royal Malta Library, poring over the eighteenth century manuscripts” (Crown) and searching for materials for his own story. Nevertheless, he did not accomplish the novel at that time, mainly because after two years of living in Malta he moved again, this time to Rome, Italy. Instead of completing the story about the Knights of Saint John, he began working on a new story which was inspired by the Italian environment, and that was his first book *Chimera* (1989). The novel won the McKitterick Prize which is awarded for the best literary debuts.

In Rome, Mawer started teaching biology at St. George's British International School. He still managed to keep his career of a biology teacher parallel to his being a

novelist. Mawer comments on his school teaching, “[t]he sort of teaching I do has not been too tiring and demanding. It depends... where you teach and how you teach. I chose teaching in order to have long holidays so that I could write... the demands of teaching in an international school are probably different from the average demands to teaching in a British school” (Vaughan). Mawer agrees with the opinion that pupils in an international school are “more motivated and that there are not the social problems” (Vaughan), he also praises the international school for introducing him to “the bilingual and multilingual culture” (Vaughan), which is something that interests him and which also inspired him when writing about the bilingual environment of Město in *The Glass Room*.

Three years after *Chimera* was published, two other Mawer’s books were brought out: the first one was *A Place in Italy* (1992), and the other was a historical novel *The Bitter Cross* (1992) for which Mawer rewrote his notes and materials from Malta. However, none of these works gained any greater success, both among critics and readers. Neither did the next novel *A Jealous God* (1996). In 1997, *Mendel’s Dwarf* came out, and as Mawer mentions in the interview with Crown the book did quite well in the United States, but not in Britain. *Mendel’s Dwarf* was Mawer’s first novel after which he has started regarding himself as a writer. He nowadays comments on the work, “I’m distant enough from it now to say it’s a bloody good book” (Crown). The next novel, *The Gospel of Judas* (2000), “was, until *The Glass Room*, his only commercial success... [However,] the book appeared half a year before *The Da Vinci Code* emerged” (Crown) which swallowed Mawer’s work; mainly because both novels, Simon Mawer’s as well as Dan Brown’s one, were dealing with a similar subject of the Roman Catholic Church. Before *The Glass Room*, three other books were published: *The Fall* (2003) which was awarded Boardman Tasker Prize for Mountain Literature, *Swimming to Ithaca* (2006) and *Gregor Mendel: Planting the Seeds of Genetics* (2006). His latest book *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky* (in the United States entitled *Trapeze*) came out in 2012. It is a historical novel about a woman who becomes an agent in France during World War Two. However, it was *The Glass Room* which has gained Mawer, the greatest success among readers as well as respect among literary critics, so far.

2.2 Discovering the Czech Republic

“Since the moment I crossed the Austrian border to the Czech Republic, I have fallen in love with this country,” says Simon Mawer in the *Mladá fronta DNES* interview with Alice Horáčková. That was in 1993. Since that time Mawer has visited the country many other times and found there inspiration for his writings.

Simon Mawer does not have any family or personal connections in the Czech Republic; nevertheless, this country caught him and changed his life. As he recalls in the interview with Alice Horáčková, his sympathies for Czechoslovakia increased in the era of Alexander Dubček and the Prague Spring. In June 1968, when hitchhiking across Europe, Mawer suggested to his friend to change their plans and travel to Czechoslovakia instead of Greece. Finally, they did not. However, it is a question whether Czechoslovakia in the summer of 1968 would make the same impression on a twenty-year-old student as it did on a forty-five-year-old married man with two children some twenty-five years later. Would it enchant him at that time as it did in 1993? And would it ever inspire him to write any novels?

For Mawer, the whole discovery of the Central Europe is a kind of a strange sensation. The Austria-Hungary Empire, as well as the First Czechoslovak Republic, is not usually taught in British schools and, in addition to that, most of Mawer’s life the Central-Eastern Europe was isolated behind the Iron Curtain. When he got to the Czech Republic for the first time it was a place “less well-known than... India or South America...” yet it was a place “which had its whole existence rooted in familiar European culture” (Johnson).

The first time Mawer heard of Brno was “either in connection with Mendel or arms factory Zbrojovka Brno ... due to the World War Two arms” (Kubíčková, translation mine), since he is keen on history. Mawer’s very first visit to the Czech Republic headed straight for Brno. As he recalls in the interview with Kubíčková, he travelled as an interested tourist by car from Italy, across Austria. At that time, he did not even know the Villa Tugendhat was there. He “knew about it, but ... did not actually know it was in Brno” (Vaughan). As a biologist, he was then interested in genetics and also intrigued by the life of the father of the modern genetics, Gregor Mendel. Therefore, the first sight he “went to see was the Augustinian convent in Staré

Brno” (Vaughan). He was totally impressed. “It was very touching for me. This is where he lived, I kept telling myself. At that time, at the beginning of the 1990’s, there was a small museum, not very good... Brno looked completely different” (Kubíčková, translation mine). The visit to Brno increased Mawer’s interest in Gregor Mendel. He realized there was a story hidden behind Mendel’s life which had a potential for a novel. Mendel came from a poor peasant family and because he needed money, he went to the monastery. And from that grew *Mendel’s Dwarf*, a novel which mixes history and fiction, plays with the life of Gregor Mendel and his fictional distant relative Benedict Lambert.

Working on *Mendel’s Dwarf*, Mawer visited the monastery once again. At the occasion of staying in Brno, he and his wife went to see the Villa Tugendhat for the first time; it was in 1995. “We supposed we could get there,” Mawer recalls “but the gate was closed, and there were some people huddling under the roof, waiting. We tried to get inside and started giving it up, when suddenly one man from the group told us in English to wait for a little moment. They had a private visit arranged. It did not cross my mind we would not be allowed to get into the Villa in an ordinary way... The man who talked to us in English... was a British sculptor, Tony Cragg, very significant creator, who was opening an exhibition near here at that time” (Kubíčková, translation mine). Mawer still remembers that exceptional feeling when he entered the house for the first time and when he was going down the stairs into the living room – into the Glass Room. He describes that it was “a real, physical shiver of the hair rising on the back of his neck, like when a majestic work of art affects you... and I was inside of that piece of work, nearly being its part” (Horáčková, translation mine). However, this was still not that moment when Mawer realized there was a potential in the Villa which could be utilized for a novel. He was still working on and was keen on the story of Gregor Mendel in those days.

“One of the offshoots of being a novelist is that you seem to become a pundit on various subjects...” comments Mawer, “[yet], when writing fiction you only have to know enough to be convincing on the page... you don’t need academic depth” (Wilson). Nevertheless, when *Mendel’s Dwarf* was released, Mawer was asked in television and radio interviews about his opinions on genetics, genetically modified food and genetic monsters. He was also commissioned by “the Field Museum in Chicago who put on a Mendel exhibition... to write a companion volume to [it]”

(Vaughan). This meant Mawer had to undertake more visits to Moravia. On one of those occasions, when he was searching for the materials about Mendel in Brno, he went to see the Villa Tugendhat again, that is ten years after his first visit. And it was really then Mawer realized there has a story behind the house. “The novelist inside me understood that building such a house, in such a country, in such a historical moment, is a subject for a novel” (Horáčková, translation mine).

Mawer’s interest in the Czech history has been growing since his very first visit of the country. Especially Mawer’s sympathies for the atmosphere and the troubles of the First Czechoslovak Republic are obvious. This is what Mawer says about the then establishment “What an exceptional country! Czechoslovakia, which was carved out of the Austria-Hungary monarchy by foreign politics, became the model of the multicultural liberal democracy... [and] all these values went up in flames [due to] foreign politics. It is a great European tragedy, and nowadays people should learn more about it and they should attempt to understand it” (Horáčková, translation mine). Mawer does not appreciate only the First Czechoslovak establishment, but also the Czechoslovak art, music and intellectual achievements that emerged within its two decades. All these appreciations came together in *The Glass Room*.

Mawer’s special delight in Brno is evident. He praises the city whenever he is asked about his opinion on it. He admires the city’s structure and its size since it is possible to understand it quite quickly. He is also fond of its history, the modern architecture and a great number of important natives, which is vividly illustrated in *The Glass Room*, as many significant personages are mentioned in the novel. When it comes to the questions about a rivalry between Prague and Brno, he understands that Brno “always feels put down by Prague... and previously, of course, put down by Vienna, which is far closer” (Vaughan). He appreciates Brno because you can see it “as it really looks like, not only attractions for tourists... [and because] there are thousands of foreign students” (Kubičková, translation mine), while in Prague, there are “herds of callow British males wandering around it, looking for cheap booze” (Johnson). Brno enchanted Mawer. It is obviously his favourite place in the Czech Republic. On the other hand, it is really hard to imagine he would not praise the city so much as the model villa for the Landauer house was located there.

2.3 Working on *The Glass Room* and the Novel's Receptions

Mawer admits, whenever being asked about his novel *The Glass Room*, he was inspired by the functionalist beauty of the Villa Tugendhat, yet, at the same time, he denies he would take over the family lot of its original owners Fritz and Greta Tugendhat. The story and the Landauer family are “entirely ... [his] own imagination” (Johnson). He does not want to deal “with the restrictions” (Johnston) which a biography puts on the author’s writing. He talks about himself as about a novelist, who tries “to capture the atmosphere rather than facts” (Kubíčková, translation mine). However, to grasp the atmosphere of a foreign country properly so that a reader can imagine it as a colourfully painted picture and not only as a black outline requires the deeper knowledge of the facts: of the history and the place. When working on a novel, Mawer does not separate the processes of the writing and the study of sources. He considers these two parts to be integral, “I start writing and during the writing I discover things that I need to know about... I don’t know what I have to say about something until I start to write about it” (Johnson). This method often leads to re-writing the passages again and again. Nevertheless, according to Mawer it was not difficult to write about Czechoslovakia. He read “a few historical books” and worked with his own impressions of Brno and the Tugendhat Villa and “the feelings [these two] caused in ... [him]. To put the plot of the book into the thirties and the forties of the last century was then a piece of cake” (Slivka, translation mine) for him.

The receptions of the book in the newspaper reviews and among critics were mostly very positive. The story of the Landauer house and its owners brought to Simon Mawer two literary nominations. In 2009, *The Glass Room* was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, one of the greatest honours which can be paid to the authors writing in English. Although the book did not win – the Prize was awarded to Hilary Mantel’s *Wolf Hall* – the nomination itself brought very positive effects, since only being short-listed is prestigious. It publicized the novel, the press became more interested in Simon Mawer and in his other works, and connected with that, the sales were risen.

In 2010, the novel was shortlisted for the Walter Scott Prize which is awarded for the best historical novels written within the United Kingdom, Ireland and the Commonwealth. This literary award was firstly given in 2010. For its purpose, historical fiction was defined as a novel in which “the majority of the events described take place

at least sixty years before the publication of the novel, and therefore stand outside any mature personal experience of the author” (Walter Scott Prize). Though Mawer is pleased the novel riveted such an attraction, he is “not particularly happy” (Johnson) about classifying it as historical. His attitude towards this is quite understandable. The period he describes is very recent and still accessible. One can imagine how the then people thought, spoke and felt. The 1930’s is the time Simon Mawer’s parents lived their youth in and therefore they could transfer their experience to their son through the ideas and the culture they liked. Writing about this period requires a different approach than writing about remote centuries since “[i]t is an almost impossible task [to put oneself] into the mind of people who are so distant” (Johnston). Although Mawer rejects the idea of calling *The Glass Room* a historical novel, he still sees the difference between novels dealing with the present-days and his *The Glass Room*.

The Czech Republic – as the country where the novel takes place – shows a special interest in Mawer. In 2010, there was a reading tour around the country which climaxed in Brno where Mawer “and his wife were guests of the city... and [were] shown round the Tugendhat Villa by Iveta Černá who is in charge of the house” (Johnson). Brno enjoyed its attention since Mawer helped to make the Villa more famous. His success in the Czech Republic is demonstrated by the fact “there are nowhere in the world such long queues in the autograph sessions as in the Czech Republic” (Kubičková, translation mine). This is highly understandable. It does not happen every day a British writer sets his novel in this country and presents its culture and its people of the highest significance. Thanks to the success of *The Glass Room*, the interest in Mawer’s older novels has grown up – particularly in *Mendel’s Dwarf* which was translated into the Czech language in 2010.

The sensation of the novel in the Czech Republic also proves the fact there have been two editions published since 2009. Both translations are Lukáš Novák’s work. The critical receptions of his work are various. While *Respekt* praises it as “a brilliant translation” (Němec, translation mine), *Deník Referendum* points out “the limits of [such] literary translations” (Pirkl, translation mine). *The Glass Room* shows the difficulties which can occur when a novel inserted into one cultural environment, yet coming from a different one, is translated into its language. Although Simon Mawer situated his Landauer Villa into the imaginative city of Město, the first edition of the Czech translation places it directly into Brno. Mawer was not very happy about that

commenting on it that “nobody consulted the translation” (Horáčková, translation mine) with him. Despite the fact he admits his strong inspiration by the city that hides behind Město, he claims he would prefer it to be “anonymous even in the Czech version” (Horáčková, translation mine). Marking Město as Brno slightly disrupts the writer’s authentic creation and, in the case of *The Glass Room*, it also breaks the thin border between reality and fiction. Město creates a distance, yet it is a question to what degree it can still be anonymous for a Czech-reader or any reader who is acknowledged with the Moravian topography. The mind of a Czech reader immediately imagines the modeled city of Brno instead of Město and not any fictional town somewhere in Moravia. There are many recognizable references in the novel which destroy the anonymity for the Czech people: Černopolní ulice, Lužánky, the river Svatka, the Špilberk castle (called even in the novel in Brno dialect Špilas) and many others. In addition to that, reading about the city called “City” can be quite disturbing for the native speaker, which is something non-Czech person cannot realize. Therefore reading about Město does not question the anonymity of the place so much as it can express doubts about the author’s creativity connected with the unfamiliarity with the Czech language. Hence it is reasonable Lukáš Novák chose to call the city Brno instead of Město.

The novel’s success was instantly noticed by film-makers. Jan Hřebejk showed a great interest in the film adaptation of the book, claiming “it does not happen every day that a significant British author writes a novel about a house in the Czech Republic with so stirred a fate” (Slivka, translation mine). Hřebejk has already discussed his thoughts of *The Glass Room* movie with Simon Mawer, who agrees and requests “the Czech production, [but] the English wording” (Slivka, translation mine). However, as the time passes, Hřebejk sees more and more problems connected with the filming. First, the novel has to be re-written into “the form Mawer would like” (Slivka, translation mine). Second, he has to procure “a foreign coproduction which is time-consuming” (Slivka, translation mine). The third problem deals with the architecture of the Villa Tugendhat since “it is impossible to make a film there... everything is fixed, so you cannot move for example with a dining table. We would probably have to fake it in the film studio” (Gregor, translation mine). And the last issue is the interior of the Villa which looks still in those days “completely timeless, like from a sci-fi... it would be difficult in such a space to emphasize its era, which is something the book ... does” (Gregor, translation

mine). However, Česká televize did not probably have such problems with the architecture and shot a document *Osud jménem Tugendhat* (2012) with scenes acted in the Villa.

3 THE FIRST CZECHOSLOVAK REPUBLIC

The main storyline of *The Glass Room* starts in 1928. Simon Mawer begins his work in the time which can be generally described as the era of optimism, hopes, liberalism and economic prosperity. Readers are shown a newlywed couple on their way to honeymoon. The pair actually reflects the era itself – they are young, rich, free, they enjoy their happiness and make plans for the future which is expected to be bright and to bring them only the best. Even a person who has no knowledge of history has to anticipate that such a positive mood cannot last forever and that things must turn out to be a little bit different in the end.

Simon Mawer portrays the pre-Depression Czechoslovakia as “... [a] brand new country... a state in which being Czech or German or Jew would not matter, in which democracy would prevail and art and science would combine to bring happiness to all people” (25-26). Optimism and idealism emanating from the extract is obvious. Mawer reflects the hopes and dreams many people really had, the optimistic mood that emerged from the long desired independence and freedom. He seems, however, to generalize about these positive views and to extend them on the whole population of the then Czechoslovakia. The presented enthusiasm, in fact, was often in contradiction to the political and social reality of the republic. Simon Mawer illustrates primarily a life of one social class, the modern nobility as we could say. Considering their standard to be universal for the whole society is no less than naïve. The political situation in the country was also everything but ideal.

Although Simon Mawer does not explicitly describe the time before the Landauers’ journey to Venice, he still digresses to the historical events that happened before – mainly through the dialogues of the characters. He thus provides readers with the basic information about the origin of Czechoslovakia and also hints at the greatest issues the new country had to deal with.

3.1 Birth of New Republic

The independence of Czechoslovakia was proclaimed in Prague on 28 October, 1918. However, this date is rather a symbolic one. The process of the separation from

the Austrian-Hungarian Empire did not happen in a day. The ideas of the new and free country had been formed during the whole World War One and had taken much effort and many discussions. The prominent organizers fighting on the international political field for the new independent national state were a philosopher and a former member of the Reichsrat (the Austrian parliament), Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, a sociologist and a skilled diplomat, Edvard Beneš, and a French General coming from Slovakia, Milan Rastislav Štefánik (in 1912 he was granted the French citizenship). The reorganization of the central Europe was not only their thought, but a standpoint which the then United States president, Woodrow Wilson, took as well and presented in his Fourteen Points¹, concretely in Point Ten. Point Ten thus claims, “[t]he people of Austria-Hungary, whose place among the nations we wish to see safeguarded and assured, should be accorded the freest opportunity to autonomous development” (Olivová 33). Although this statement did not guarantee the existence of an independent country, but only asked for the autonomy of the nations living within the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy, it helped Masaryk to convince the Allies of the necessity of an independent country. The Czechoslovak Declaration of Independence (drafted in Washington therefore also named the Washington Declaration) was published in Paris on 18 October, 1918, and proclaimed in Prague ten days later when the Czech politicians peacefully took over the rule. In the Declaration of Independence, Masaryk stated the basic principles of the new country. Czechoslovakia was to become a republic with a parliamentary political system, to provide the freedom of religion, speech and the press, equal rights for women, the right of assembly and the petition, and to respect the rights of minorities. In addition to that, the Declaration operates with the term Czechoslovak Nation, which had not been used in any official documents and agreements before. This establishment was enshrined in the Constitution of 1920.

The Revolutionary National Assembly, which was in the position of the parliament in the composition according to the elections of 1911, appointed the first Czechoslovak president, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk on 14 November, 1918 – in his absence, he was still abroad then. At the same time, the Assembly dethroned the Habsburg dynasty. Masaryk was re-elected three times: in 1920, 1927 and 1934. He

¹ The Fourteen Points is a statement of Woodrow Wilson dealing with the organization of the world after the World War One from the United States point of view. It was pronounced on 8 January, 1918.

was, in fact, exempted from the constitutional law which states the presidential office is limited on two terms, one term then took – under the French influence – seven years.

Simon Mawer builds his Czechoslovakia on these basic constitutional principles. However, he praises them so much and believes in them unwaveringly that he does not concede they could be sometimes violated – as the author of this thesis will prove later. Mawer often directly mentions the republic was a multicultural, multilingual, liberal democracy – either in the utterances of the individual characters or in the basic narration. In this way, readers are recalled Victor’s desire is “not to be pinned down by race or creed” (Mawer 20), through which Mawer presents freedom of religion and ethnicity declared by the Constitution; reputed equality of languages – which did not, however, hold in the whole republic – stated as Victor is able speak “Czech as well as German” (Mawer 20). Two pages later, Mawer points out bilingualism in Město when Liesel utters “where we live everything has to names. Austrian. Czech.” (Mawer 22). Readers are still reminded how major characters switch from German to Czech and vice versa. Mawer emphasizes what was spoken in Czech and what in German. From time to time, Mawer reminds his readers the Czechoslovak environment is a “young democracy” (99) and a “stable democracy in the heart of Europe” (118). In some parts, these frequent remarks appear rather like excerpts cut out of a grammar school textbook and Mawer thus gets, unfortunately, into the position of a history teacher; nevertheless, it is a different issue. The stable democracy Mawer builds his work on had to deal with many troubles, in fact. Mawer proves the stability and democracy of the country in the easiest way he can – he just omits these problematic issues or he puts them on the periphery so that they appear rather negligible.

Of course, Czechoslovakia was a democratic and liberal country, especially in comparison to many other European countries, from the Stalinist regime in the Soviet Union to Jozef Pilsudski’s dictatorship in Poland, or Spain and its Civil War. Czechoslovakia never inclined to totalitarian regimes and military dictatorships which could be symbolically seen in Liesel’s conversation with the young Italian Fascist who “extolled the virtues of Fascism” (Mawer 12), yet Liesel comments on his ideas they are “absurd” and the man sounds very like “a barbarian” (Mawer 12). Through her Mawer expresses the general opinion of the majority of Czechoslovaks on totalitarianism.

Mawer also briefly acquaints his readers with the origin of Czechoslovakia. He mentions the country used to be a part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, that it gained

its independence, that it is a democratic state. “The Emperor has gone, Woodrow Wilson has spoken, the principle of self-determination has been established, and that’s it. Bye bye the dual monarchy and all that went along with it” (Mawer 159). Although Simon Mawer mentions the right of self-determination in the given extract on which the Czechoslovak leaders based the origin of a new republic, he does not emphasize in his novel there was another group of people that adhered to the right of self-determination as well – the Germans living in the Czechoslovak territory.

3.2 Czechoslovaks and Minorities

For the creation of the new republic the idea of Czechoslovakism (that is one Czechoslovak nation) became essential. The Czechoslovaks were the state nation, while the other nations turned into minorities. The concept of Czechoslovakism, which was well-accepted especially in the Czech environment, was built on the idea that the Czech people and the Slovak people are two branches of one nation that was once separated by foreign policies. The idea was built on the language similarities and the recent close cooperation. Despite the fact there were more than three millions Germans in the republic, they became a minority. Without the concept of Czechoslovakism, there would be fewer Slovaks than Germans. There was almost one quarter of Germans in the whole republic, and in the Czech lands they comprised around one third of its inhabitants. Within the Czechoslovak nation, there were only around “1,910,000 Slovaks” (Bělina et al. 169), which means around 14,5% of the whole population.

The table below shows compositions of the nationalities in Czechoslovakia according to the census of 1921 (Beneš 40)².

Nationalities of Czechoslovakia in 1921		
total population	13,613,172	
Czechoslovaks	8,760,937	64,35%
Germans	3,123,568	22,95%
Magyars	745,431	5,48%
Ukrainians and Russians	461,849	3,39%
Poles	75,853	0,56%
Jews	180,855	1,33%

Since Simon Mawer's *Město* is modelled on Brno, the author this thesis presents the situation in the city. Brno was nationally mixed at the time of the First Czechoslovak Republic. However, the predominant majority of its inhabitants were the Czechoslovak people. Brno had around "210,000 inhabitants" out of which "156,000... [people (that is) 72%] professed Czech nationality, and 52,000 inhabitants of Brno (20,3%) professed German nationality" (Čejka and Olivová 117).

Immediately after the Declaration of Independence, the Czech Germans rejected the new republic, refused to participate in the National Assembly and declared four autonomous provinces which were to be independent of Czechoslovakia, and which they strived to incorporate to German-Austria³. These provinces were Deutschböhmen (the north Bohemia with the centre in Liberec), Sudetenland (German areas of the Orlické Mountains, the north Moravia and Silesia with the centre in Opava), Böhmerwaldgau (the south-west Bohemia, the region of the Bohemian Forest, its centre in Prachatice) and Deutschsüdmähren (the south Moravia with the centre in Znojmo),

² The census of 1921 determined the nationality on the basis of the mother tongue. The Jews were the only exception. They "were allowed to embrace either Jewish or any other nationality, regardless of their native tongue. Thus, in 1921, of the 354,000 persons of Jewish faith living on the Czechoslovak territory around 180,000 chose to embrace the Jewish nationality" (Beneš 41).

³ German-Austria was a republic which followed the Austro-Hungarian Empire reduced to the areas where the German language was dominant. Its frontiers correspond to the current Austrian ones.

and to these “the towns of Brno, Jihlava and Olomouc should have been added” (Cuhra et al. 14, translation mine). After the failed negotiations, the Czechoslovak Army occupied these areas “with the secret agreement of France” (Cuhra et al. 15). The German people did not offer almost any resistance to the troops as they were still exhausted by the Great War and, in addition to that, the German industrials sensed the economic advantages of the affiliation to the republic which is on the side of the victorious Allies. Nevertheless, a few months later, in March 1919, when the First Republic of Austria was declared, the huge anti-Czechoslovak uprisings and demonstrations burst out in the border areas, which were finally suppressed by the Army and during which “fifty people” (Weger 13) were killed. “This tragic incident, rare in the history of the First Czechoslovak Republic, affected the Czech-German relationship for a long time” (Cuhra et al. 15).

The Glass Room deals with the matter of the German minority mostly in the 1930’s, when the radicalism was growing. The issue of the 1920’s is indicated only briefly in dialogues as presented:

‘I was the toast of Vienna,’ Liesel’s mother told him. ‘Those were the days, Herr von Abt. When the Monarchy was still alive.’

... ‘Mother, the Monarchy was moribund long before Herr Klimt painted you. It just took a long time dying.’

‘It was socialism that killed it,’ her mother retorted. ‘Had the Socialists not killed it, it would still be there. And now we are left living in a state dreamed up by foreigners.’

... ‘The war is what killed the Monarchy,’ Liesel insisted. ‘The war killed the Monarchy just as it killed Benno. Stupid old men thinking that they might play around with fighting just as they did throughout the last century. And they found out that they couldn’t, that war kills people, ruins lives and destroys countries...’ (Mawer 33).

Mawer nicely presents through the marking “foreigners” both the fact the establishment of Czechoslovakia was supported by the Western Allies and, at the same time, the ideas of some Czech Germans who suddenly found themselves in the country of strangers. Both the Czechs and the Germans adhered to the right of nations to self-

determination. The Czechs, however, only wanted a separation from the Austria-Hungary Empire in the historical territory of the Czech lands, while the Germans demanded to detach the areas where the German majority lived. The extract also shows the generation gap between the conservative aging woman recalling her youth, beauty and popularity and her daughter who holds the optimistic, pacifistic and modernist opinions which Mawer praises in the novel. In the spirit of “[o]ut with the old, in with the new” (Mawer 12), the opinion of Liesel’s mother is given a negative undertone which can hence make an impression of the wrong one – and hereby readers can incorrectly understand the whole German minority issue was also a nonsensical idea that only older German conservatives expressed, and therefore being a small, unimportant problem of that time Czechoslovakia.

The situation between Czechoslovaks and Germans calmed down to some extent after 1920. Although there were no greater troubles in the first half of the First Republic, small brawling between both nations occasionally happened – as Mawer presents in the following conversation between a foreman and Rainer von Abt:

‘... You know we had a fight today? On the site, right here. Something about politics, a Czech speaker and a German speaker and the stupid was, the Czech was called Mlynář and the German was called Müller.’

‘Mlynarsch?’

The foreman laughs at von Abt’s attempt at the pronunciation. ‘It means “miller”. The bastards each had the same name. I slung both of them out on their ears, I did. Well, you can’t have the sort of thing getting in the way of work, can you? Not when things are looking as bad as they are at the moment’ (47).

By giving both workmen the same surname in their mother tongues, Mawer expresses their equality and thus the nonsensicality of their fight. Mawer could make the situation even more absurd, if he gave them the opposite names – calling the German workman Mlynář and the Czech one Müller, which was not infrequent. To determine the political affair their fight was about is, however, uneasy. A watchful reader can guess the event occurred in a late April day of 1929⁴, nevertheless no

⁴ Simon Mawer does not explicitly mention years of events. Readers have to orient in time – if they want to get deeply into the novel – on the basis of the individual historical events, seasons or months.

important event in this month or close months before happened – neither in Czechoslovakia nor in Germany. The Czech German political parties stood in the opposition until 1926 when they got for the first time into the parliament – yet, these were moderate parties. The German National Socialist Worker’s Party (known under the German abbreviation DNSAP) was in the 1920’s still an unimportant party. Although Mawer tries to incorporate the German issue, he does not put an emphasis on it as the foreman ignorantly notes “something about politics”. In addition to that, the foreman’s complaining about “things... looking... bad... at the moment” seems to be pulled out of the context, since the Great Depression time was to come six months later.

The situation in Slovakia with the Hungarian minority was complicated as well. It was aggravated as there was no historical border between Slovakia and Hungary and also by the fact the Magyar communist revolutionary Béla Kun attempted to save the erstwhile territory of the great Hungary. The Hungarian troops began to occupy Slovakia – although the frontiers were finally defined in Paris in January 1919 – and the Czechoslovak Army got thus into its only greater war which was won, but due to “the diplomatic intervention of the Allies” (Cuhra et al. 14).

Simon Mawer reflects on the issue when Kata representing a Magyar appears on the scene.

Should he have given a false name? Was Kata itself false? What was it really? Katarina, something like that? She was, she told him, Hungarian not Slav, although she came from Slovakia; but then there were many Hungarians living across the border in the new country, weren’t there? Just another group of people cut off from their origins by politicians drawing lines on maps (57-58).

The extract deals with Viktor’s inner thoughts, yet the final sentence seems to change rather into Mawer’s own voice. It is quite a paradox, Mawer presents the German issue in such a light and unimportant manner while, on the other hand, he openly pities the Hungarian minority and criticizes the politicians “drawing lines on maps”. The author of this thesis offers two possible interpretations of his act. First, he secretly expresses the German minority was overlooked and often considered by most politicians and the Czechoslovak majority not to be dangerous (in the 1920’s). Second, it is just his personal humanist opinion he wanted to insert into his novel and did not

realize he applied a double standard on two minorities within Czechoslovakia. Considering other mistakes in the book has (which will be discussed later), the author of this thesis holds the second view.

Simon Mawer praises bilingualism in his book. However, Czechoslovakia was not a multilingual or bilingual country. The official language of the republic was only one: Czechoslovak, which means the Czech and the Slovak languages were equal. The regions with “more than 20%” (Bělina 169) of the non-Czechoslovak nationality were allowed to use the other language at offices. However, in 1926 the usage of the state language was more specified. Employees working at state services – including judges, teachers, postmen, railwaymen – had to pass the official language (that is Czech or Slovak) exams, “which especially Germans bitterly accepted” (Bělina 169, translation mine). If they managed to pass the oral examination, they usually failed the written part which was based on the Czech grammar. Those who did not manage to pass the exams had to leave their jobs.

Czechoslovakia was a country proclaiming the equality of people, yet the fact is it mattered whether you are Czechoslovak or not. Mawer blindly believes in abiding the Declaration and therefore he describes “a state in which being Czech or Jew or German would not matter” (Mawer 25) and a town “where... everything has to names. Austrian. Czech” (Mawer 22). He can thus make a false impression of a perfect country. Yet it was just a dream detached from the reality. If you were Czechoslovak, it gave you officially a status of superiority, since you lived in your own state, while being a German meant you belonged to a minority. A minority with rights, of course – yet, still a mere minority whose language was not even the official one, the national anthem was sung in the Czech language, the cinematography produced films mainly in Czech, and the Radiojournal broadcasted only a few minutes a week in the German language, later around thirty minutes a day. None of the German speaking characters in the novel seem to be touched by that.

What is indeed the environment of the characters? It tries to be presented as a mixed one, multicultural and bilingual. Looking at it from the ethnic point of view, readers can claim Viktor is a Jew, Liesel a German, Hana a Czech, Kata a Hungarian and Rainer von Abt an Austrian. Yet, all those characters speak predominantly German: Rainer does, Viktor as well to both Liesel and Kata, Hana to Liesel. The Czech language stands rather on the periphery. Only the maid, the chauffeur and the nanny use

it, some artists and intellectuals when they appear on the scene and occasionally Hana when she is under the spurt of emotions. Readers can therefore assume the Landauer surroundings are rather German, which means the minority environment – at least if it is classified on the basis of the used tongue, which is what censuses did. However, they are never pictured as if they belonged to a minority (except for Kata who lives in the poor Jewish quarter in Vienna) and what is more important, Mawer attempts to present they do not feel so.

Viktor is an internationalist, optimistically believing that faith, race and nationality do not make (and especially will not make in future) any differences among people. One can clearly see this inclination in these given extracts:

[Viktor speaking] ‘Universal, that’s the idea behind the project: neither Jewish nor German. Nor Czech come to that. International’ (Mawer 64).

‘They mustn’t be labelled,’ Viktor has always insisted, ‘not by language, nor by culture, nor family or anything. They must be brought up as citizens of the world.’ (Mawer 89).

Viktor believes in equality – yet interestingly not in the social one – in equality in which there is no place for majorities or minorities, and therefore he does not consider himself to be a part of any. Later, as the Nazism in Germany grows, he realizes his Jewishness, however, it is rather a mere fear connected with the Nazi threat and his being a Jew than some sense of belonging to the Jewish community. Hypothetically, Mawer was lucky he did not insert any census into his story, the character of Victor would surely have difficulties to choose (being a Jew, he could choose whatever nationality he felt he inclines to and not according to the mother tongue as the others).

Liesel is not as easy to assess as she could appear at first. She is obviously a Czech German – on the basis of her language and her Austrian parents, yet never considers herself to be a part of the German minority. Therefore, readers could claim she feels at home in Czechoslovakia, especially as she condemns the old monarchy in an argument with her mother and reveals her hopes into the new country, “... that war kills people, ruins lives and destroys countries. But now perhaps we can build a new one, if they’ll let us” (Mawer 33). An evidence she does not feel any greater sense of

togetherness to Germans is implied in her answer to Rainer von Abt, “We are Czechish” (Mawer 13). Although this response is meant to indicate Viktor’s and her citizenship, it also determines her mental pertaining. Otherwise, she would definitely distinguish herself in a sense ‘I am a Czech German’. In Switzerland, during her conversation with Kata about their love for Viktor, she mentions, “[y]ou don’t speak Czech, do you? Of course you don’t. Well, in Czech we have an expression, *propadnout lásce*, to fall in love” (Mawer 205). The personal pronoun ‘we’ tries again to imply her relation to the republic and the language. Yet, the paradox is Liesel does not speak Czech almost in any part of the book – neither to her husband, children or friend. One could therefore assume it is probably the exile and the patriotism of emigrants which helps her to rediscover the Czech language in herself. It can appear, until this part, Liesel does not feel any connections to the German minority. She is a Czechoslovak who speaks German. However, the next conversation with Rainer von Abt suggests the opposite,

In the pause between movements, von Abt leaned to Liesel and breathed in her ear, ‘Why are Czechs always so mournful?’

‘They have,’ she whispered back, ‘a great deal to be mournful about.’ (Mawer 34)

Using the personal pronoun ‘they’, Liesel clearly detaches herself from the Czechs. The question is why so, when the other parts of the book depict her otherwise. Liesel is not portrayed as an indecisive, unstable woman, whose opinions would quickly succumb to the others. The author of this thesis has only two possible interpretations of the given extract. The conversation either expresses an occasional deviation from Liesel’s usual mental being caused by the strong sexual attraction towards the architect, or it is just another of Mawer’s errors.

3.3 Politics

The political situation in the country was rather very changeable. In the whole existence of the twenty years of the First Czechoslovak Republic, there were “eighteen various cabinets” (Cuhra et al. 47, translation mine). Nevertheless, the coalitions were

usually composed by the same parties and “to some extent by the same people” (Cuhra et al. 47, translation mine).

The most important parties were: the Republican Party of Agricultural and Smallholder People – a right-wing, conservative party oriented on small peasants; the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party – a left-wing party, supported by working class, the Czechoslovak National Social Party – had nothing in common with the German national socialists, except for the similar name, for example Edvard Beneš and Milada Horáková were its members, a central-left-wing party oriented towards the Castle, supported across the classes (a part of the working class people, craftsmen, self-employed people, intellectuals); the Czechoslovak National Democratic Party – a right-wing party, very patriotic, slightly radical, fighting against the growing influence of Germans, supported by entrepreneurs; and the Czechoslovak’s People Party – oriented religiously on the Catholics. These parties were together known as Pětka. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia was founded in 1921 after the separation of the revolutionary side from the Social Democrats. The Party was one of the strongest in the Republic, in elections gained over 10% and was usually in cabinets. The Czechoslovak section was the second-largest in the Communist International. In 1929, the Party was bolshevized and Klement Gottwald became its leading person. In his first – really unforgettable – speech in the parliament he revealed the real attitude and aims of his Party, “[A]nd we, we are the party of the Czechoslovak proletariat and our highest central is really Moscow. And we go to Moscow to learn, and you know what? We go to learn to Moscow from the Russian Bolsheviks how to wring your neck. And you know the Russian Bolsheviks are masters in that” (Bělina et al. 180, translation mine).

Simon Mawer leaves the Czechoslovak political world out because it does not actually play any greater importance for his story. On the other hand, it makes an impression the Landauers lives in a kind of a bubble which was detached from the outside reality. Mawer never mentions any disputes among politicians or the parliamentary elections – not even those when the Sudetendeutsche Partei won the elections in 1935. No one criticizes the changes inside cabinets or the bolshevization of the Communist Party and Klement Gottwald’s speech, which was a big issue at that time discussed by similar circles Mawer tries to present. None of the major characters is a member of any party and no Czechoslovak politicians visit the Landauers’ dinners, which is rather unusual for the First Republic era. It is clear Mawer cannot capture all

the political troubles of that time since his work is a novel and not a non-fiction. Yet maybe instead of incessant idealistic talks about the equality of the languages, the writer could insert at least one remark on the Czechoslovak political situation.

Mawer rightly records some freedoms the then democratic system offered – such as the religious freedom, the equality of women, the possibility to travel. However, paradoxically, he never mentions the fundamental freedom of the democratic country and it is the freedom to vote.

As the author of this thesis stated before there are no remarks on the Czechoslovak political situation, yet some behaviour and opinions of the Landauers can tell much about their political attitudes. The following extract clearly introduces the political orientation of Liesel – that is her left-wing inclination towards socialism.

‘It was socialism that killed it,’ her mother retorted. ‘Had the Socialists not killed it, it would still be there. And now we are left living in a state dreamed up by foreigners.’

There was an awkward pause... ‘The war is what killed the Monarchy,’ Liesel insisted. ‘The war killed the Monarchy just as it killed Benno. Stupid old men thinking that they might play around with fighting just as they did throughout the last century. And they found out that they couldn’t, that war kills people, ruins lives and destroys countries. But now perhaps we can build a new one, if they’ll let us. Socialism *builds* things.’

The silence deepened, became cavernous. Her mother looked appalled. Socialism? The idea seemed outrageous. Not only outrageous but dangerous (Mawer 33).

Nevertheless, Liesel’s political tendencies are kept only on the level of this one dinner talk. Nowhere else Mawer mentions she is a socialist. During the crisis she is portrayed rather as an ignorant lady who is able to fight only for her onyx wall. A kind of leftish solidarity is later presented in Liesel’s attempt and enthusiasm to help refugees, especially Kata – in fact, social democrats were those who were mainly engaged in helping emigrants after 1933.

Viktor's political orientation is never stated. In a short dialogue between Liesel and Rainer von Abt (after the above presented dinner), readers learn Missis Landauer's socialistic visions correspond rather to the architects:

'If you decide to storm the barricades, I will surely follow,' he murmured to Liesel as they followed her parents to the drawing room to listen to Němec play. She had to suppress her laughter. 'I'm afraid that you'll leave Viktor behind' (Mawer 34).

This little conversation can be perceived also metaphorically – Liesel provoking at dinner ('barricades' symbolizing the conservatives and 'storm' opposing them) and Rainer willing to affiliate. It gives a clear proof they both are socialists – unlike Viktor. One of the hints which can help readers to assume Viktor's political stance is his reading *Lidové noviny* – one of the independent newspapers of the era, which supported the Castle. As stated above, the Czechoslovak National Social Party also endorsed the Castle and the system of the republic as a whole; therefore, one could assume Viktor's sympathies with this party.⁵ (The author of this thesis excludes other parties – People's Party for Viktor's atheism, the Agrarian Party for Viktor's being a huge capitalist and a factory owner, the Communist Party for its radicalism and because he is even against Socialism and the National Democratic Party for its slight radicalism against the German minority.) On the other hand, Viktor's belief in internationalism⁶ must be also considered as well as his dreams not to be labelled – "not by language, nor by culture, nor by family or anything" (Mawer 89). It is not difficult to guess that such a person would not like to be marked by politics either. Viktor is thus an independent supporting the Castle and the democratic system.

The foreign policy was governed by Edvard Beneš, who served as the Foreign Minister from the beginning of the Czechoslovakia until 1935 when he became the second Czechoslovak president. He orientated the policy especially towards the alliance

⁵ The author of this thesis builds this hypothesis on the assumption Simon Mawer based his work on the general facts about the parties.

⁶ The author of this thesis does not consider Viktor to be a communist internationalist - although many, yet lower class Jews, were attracted by communism (especially after the World War Two) until the Stalin's repressions against Jews around 1948.

with France, which had enchanted him during his studies at Sorbonne. In 1924, Czechoslovakia signed a bilateral treaty with France. On the other hand, Beneš managed to build an independent foreign policy which many times stood against the international interests of France. He was also one of the initiators of The Little Entente, the alliance between Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia against a possible Hungarian reprisal and the attempts of Karl Habsburg to re-ascend the Hungarian throne. France later supported the Entente by concluding the treaties with each member.

Simon Mawer does not mention the Czechoslovak foreign policy in his novel. He only presents the Czechoslovak cultural admiration for France, yet not political. In the matter of politics, Mawer mostly reflects on the political situation and changes in the German-speaking world (Germany and Austria).

3.4 Economy and Society

3.4.1 Prosperity of 1920's

The Czechoslovak economic situation was regionally imbalanced. The new republic embodied two areas “with wide differences in historical tradition, economic development, and administrative system” (Pryor 190). The three countries of the Czech lands, which had appertained to the Austrian part within the former monarchy, were the most industrialized areas of the Empire (along with Austria), while Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia which had belonged for a thousand years to Hungary were mainly rural provinces where the industry was in its beginnings.

After the First World War, Czechoslovakia advanced the idea of “the economic nationalism... and the protectionisms (imposing customs duties, the limitation on import)” (Cuhra et al. 41, translation mine). Simon Mawer indicates this change after the fall of the Austria-Hungary Empire in the given passages:

‘And did you have a good journey?’

‘Certainly, because of the anticipation of seeing you both again. But passport control at the border was ridiculous. It seems ironical that, though the world is moving forward, it has created a new border control where before none existed.’

‘I suppose that’s the price of change. It’s a small loss of freedom compared with other freedoms we have gained’ (Mawer 27).

It was Němec’s wife who unwittingly saved the situation... She found Vienna full of shops and cafés, a positive plethora... ‘Prague has nothing to compare,’ she complained, ‘and so I am *forced* to go to Vienna. And then they try and charge me duty at the border (Mawer 33).

Mawer depicts the installed protectionism and at the same time describes two diverse opinions which both the defenders of the borders and many common people had. Rainer von Abt, in his 1920’s pro-Schengen view, and Němec’s wife, with her Viennese shopping sprees, represent the ordinary people who were tired of the sudden controls. Economics and politics, though, saw the advantages of the border controls. It is also necessary to say, both conversations are from 1928 – that is ten years after the independence of Czechoslovakia – at that time people were already used to those controls. Liesel’s erudite reaction is, however, much more interesting. “I suppose that’s the price of change. It’s a small loss of freedom compared with other freedoms we have gained” (Mawer 27). Although this remark deals with the passport controls which are not a big issue, Mawer indicates the new republic had to also restrict some freedoms. Nevertheless, he only relates to this rather negligible change which did not harm many people – in comparison to the language restrictions or the land reform which was for the involved people rather an expensive “price of change”. The land reform of 1919 dealt with the expropriation of the land which was possessed by large landowners (around one third of the Czechoslovak land) – mostly German and Hungarian aristocracy. The state confiscated an agricultural land above 150 ha and non-agricultural above 250 ha.

The republic was building its own production trying to be as independent of other countries as possible. “In 1925” (Bělina et al. 180), Czechoslovakia reached its pre-war industrial state and till 1929 its economy was growing fast. In the 1920’s, the Czechoslovak industrial situation was on the similar level as that of “Italy, Austria, Norway and Finland” (Cuhra et al. 42, translation mine) – intermediately developed. New factories with modern technologies were founded, for example the Czechoslovak arms factory in Brno, the military aeroplanes factory in Kbely, or the explosives factory Explosie in Semtín (Pardubice). “Until the beginning of the 1930’s, almost all industry

was electrified and more than 80% of households” (Bělina et al. 181, translation mine) as well. The sugar, the glass and the textile industries were the most widespread. The car industry took pride in the brand names such as Praga, Tatra, and Laurin & Klement. However, for its “technological underdevelopment [in its fabrication, the Czechoslovak cars] were not able to compete with the Western production” (Cuhra et al. 42, translation mine). Baťa’s shoe industry was quite unique within Czechoslovakia. From the beginning, Baťa produced shoes mechanically and focused on the cheap yet well-elaborated production made for the common people, not for the highest class. He also tried to improve his workers’ living conditions by building the colonies of the small houses.

On the whole, the living conditions of the population improved in the 1920’s as the economy was growing. However, the gaps between the individual social classes were still immense. The working class people often lived on the poverty line. People worked from Monday to Saturday – Sunday was free. The law forbade the children under fourteen years old to work. For better notion of the Czechoslovak social situation, the author of this thesis presents the table comparing the average month salaries⁷ of the chosen occupations in Czechoslovakia, Germany and the United States in the second half of the 1920’s – recounted to the Czechoslovak crowns (Kubů et al. 193, translation mine).

Occupation	Prague	Berlin	New York
university professor	3,250 – 5,500	9,600	11,200 – 16,800
elementary school teacher	1,500	3,040	4,960
intermediate clerk	2,000	3,040	4,560
typist	800	1,120	4,000
workman – qualified	875	1,840	4,800
workman – unqualified	665	1,335	3,040

It is important to realize that the table shows the average salaries. The workmen’s wages differed according to the industry they were engaged in. Also, the apprentices were paid out less money. As Jan Čurda in his article “Konec iluzí o první

⁷ The table presents the average month salaries, yet the wages were usually paid out weekly.

republice” writes, such workmen-beginners earned “around 90 crowns a week” (translation mine). On the other hand, “Czechoslovakia had... in comparison to many other countries relatively developed system of the social security. In 1924 the insurance law in case of illness, disability and old age was passed” (Čurda, translation mine). In case of illness, workers were then paid out the health insurance in “two thirds of the wage” (Čurda, translation mine). People above sixty years old – “excluding self-employers and farmers” (Čurda, translation mine) – were paid the old age pension.

As the earnings have to be always related to the costs, the next table compares the prices of the selected items in Czechoslovakia, Germany and the United States in the second half of the 1920’s – recounted to the Czechoslovak crowns (Kubů et al 193, translation mine).

Item	Prague	Berlin	New York
rent of a three-room flat	900	440 – 760	3,040
1 m ³ gas	1.50	1.44	0.80
1 kWh	2.70	1.60	0.80
ready-to-wear suit	500	640	1,040 – 1,200
1 pair of shoes	100	160	200
1 kg bread	2	3.10	6.40
1 kg beef	16	17.60 – 23.20	16
1 kg potatoes	0.70	0.51	2.40
1 kg sugar	6.30	4.57	4
matchbox	0.20	0.24	0.32

In addition to the table above: Jan Čurda mentions in his article the price of “1 kg pork 13.30 Cs crowns, men’s shirt 27.50 Cs crowns... a cinema ticket 5 Cs crowns, beer⁸ 1.50 Cs crowns” (translation mine).

Simon Mawer depicts family life from the higher social circles that never has to deal with the existential problems of what they will eat tomorrow or whether they will have enough money to pay the rent. They can afford a chauffeur, a cook, a nanny for

⁸ Jan Čurda does not specify the amount of beer.

their children. Viktor is a car factory owner, but, readers are never provided with more concrete details about his job. They are only told how his behaviour at home differs from that at the factory:

... this man at her side, who seemed, for that moment when he was acknowledging the welcome, no longer her beloved Viktor but a stranger... This is how he would be at the factory, she guessed; how he would be with the workers' delegations, with the foremen and the managers. A kind of detached graciousness, as though dealing with a tiresome but respected relative (Mawer 9).

The fact Liesel does not recognize Viktor's behaviour is not surprising. Generally speaking, women of that era (talking about women from the higher social class) were not much interested in their husbands' businesses unless they earned money. Liesel and Hana represent women who are well-provided and thus do not have to work (Hana's husband is a Jewish lawyer). That is also the reason, they have more time to follow their interests and be more active in cultural life, on the contrary to working class women. On the one hand Liesel is portrayed as indifferent towards the outside world and the lower class people. This is presented during the Depression time when Viktor thinks of her in given way:

She lived in her protected world, along with Hana Hanáková and her other friends, and they talked about their painters and their musicians and their actors and actresses, and meanwhile the outside world battled with recession... (Mawer 54-55).

On the other hand, when she personally speaks to lower-class people, she is a warm-hearted person, which can be seen in her treating Kata and the way her servants talk about her. Laník's note "[s]he was alright. Lovely woman really" (Mawer 208) in time of the Protectorate can be perceived as a significant proof. Especially if one considers Laník's low character and the fact he would not mind slandering others behind their backs.

In public, Viktor behaves graciously to the lower class. Yet, readers can sense his detachment from the working people, “[f]rom time to time, usually in the factory, he met women of her [Kata’s] class. He would exchange pleasantries with them, but they never talked” (Mawer 59). Viktor never talked to these women because he felt they had nothing to talk about. Yet Kata persuades him that even these women can enrich him and show him the world from a different perspective. He is attracted to Kata for her animal and sensuous character, for her being quick and amusing, independent and strong to take care of herself and also for her life-experience. However, in the beginning, Viktor looks down on her, feeling embarrassed, guilty, and disgusted by himself as he “succumb[ed] to the attractions of such a woman” (Mawer 65). Therefore, readers can consider Viktor to be quite a snob – claiming he does not want to be labelled by race, creed, or by languages, yet, he does not mind he is marked by his social class.

3.4.2 Great Depression of 1930’s

The Great Depression affected Czechoslovakia a little bit later than the other countries, “it culminated in summer of 1933 and subsided more slowly” (Bělina 181, translation mine). The consumer industry was hit as the first one, the other industrial fields followed after 1931. “The export decreased to one third of the pre-crisis state, the industrial production to 60% of the 1929 level” (Bělina 181, translation mine). Until the beginning of World War Two, Czechoslovakia was not able to reach its pre-depression standard. The crisis got into a vicious circle. Entrepreneurs needed to maintain their sales, yet the people did not have money since they were dismissed from employments or their wages decreased. The table below shows the number of the unemployed people in Czechoslovakia (Lacina 199).

The number of the unemployed in Czechoslovakia (in rounded figures)	
1929	42,000
1930	105,000
1931	291,000
1932	554,000
1933	738,000
1934	677,000
1935	686,000

The table, however, presents only the number of registered unemployed people. According to estimations, there were in fact around 1.3 million unemployed. To this number, the whole families who were dependent on the wage-earning person had to be added. In all, from “one quarter to one third of the whole population was affected” (Cuhra et al. 67) by the unemployment. The unemployment benefits were paid out only to those who were members of the labour unions, the state also added some part to these amounts. The rest who were not in the labour unions, were given so called ‘žebračenky’ (beggar-tickets) – week food vouchers.

One of the reactions to the growing unemployment and the decrease of the wages was the Great Most Strike in 1932. Almost for a month, miners in the north-west Bohemia protested against the continuous dismissing. Because of the enormous number of the miners who went to strike (several thousands), it became the greatest strike in the whole Czechoslovak era which was not suppressed. Many left-wing artists and intellectuals openly supported the minors – among others Vítězslav Nezval, Vladislav Vančura, Jiří Voskovec, Jan Werich. There was also a massive demonstration of thousands of people who showed their sympathies with the miners. Unfortunately, in clashes between the police, soldiers and demonstrators, two civilians were shot and several injured. Finally, some of the miners’ demands were accepted and the strike thus came to its end.

The crisis in the German border areas was much worse because the affected light industry was concentrated there – the porcelain, the glass, the textile, the paper-producing and the chemical industries which focused mainly “on export and in addition to that, these industries were ‘inessential’ therefore limited during the crises” (Cuhra et

al. 66, translation mine). Furthermore, the German enterprises gained less state contracts, because “the system... took into consideration the state and civil reliability” (Cuhra et al. 68, translation mine). The difficult conditions and the sense of the injustice of the Czechoslovak Germans soon became the instrument of the political propaganda against the republic.

Nevertheless, even in the time of the deepest crisis, there were still circles of people whose living situation was not affected so significantly. They still visited cafés, restaurants and balls, built houses and villas, bought cars and paintings, or travelled abroad, not many things had changed for those people. However “for the society as the whole... [the crisis] was unexpected, the state and the private entrepreneurs... coped with it slowly and everybody with no exceptions experienced it or at least witnessed its devastating impact” (Cuhra et al. 69, translation mine).

The novel deals with the Great Depression only in a transferred way through Viktor’s affair with Kata who needs money. Mawer hints at the unemployment through Kata’s remark to Liesel, “[w]hen you can’t find a job and you can’t afford the rent, then things look very different” (Mawer 203). Interestingly, Viktor’s affair with Kata starts in autumn of 1929, in the crisis’ beginning. On the other hand, readers can guess from previous Kata’s remarks that she was used to getting more money in this way even before her acquaintance with Viktor,

’[h]ow often have you done this?’ he asked.

‘Gone with a stranger?’ She made a face, a small moue of discontent. ‘A few times. I’m not a tart, you know. I work in the fashion business. This is only when I need a bit of extra’ (Mawer 58).

This would imply it was not directly the crisis which pushed her into this situation and thus that Mawer does not illustrate the Great Depression as such, but rather the miserable living conditions of the working class people, in general. Vienna is the only place where the lower class world is presented – a Jewish poor quarter and Kata’s humble flat. On the contrary, in Czechoslovakia Mawer does not deal with the Great Depression in any details. From time to time, readers are simply reminded by Viktor’s voice there is a recession, yet they are never provided with any deeper views on the life of the Czechoslovak people, who would be affected or unemployed. Viktor

never complains he would have to dismiss people at his factory or that anyone in his surroundings went bankrupt. Even the Great Most Strike is not mentioned although it was a big issue discussed at that time. Mawer presents that lucky circle of people who were not significantly affected by the crisis – the lucky society whose life went on in the similar way as it did before the crisis. However, Mawer's Czechoslovakia thus can make a false impression that the republic was not affected by the crisis at all, a false impression there were no poor quarters, no beggars – in comparison to Vienna.

3.4.3 Liberal Society and Moral Paragon Masaryk

After the Great War, many people held an opinion that it was necessary to separate the post-war world from the world of the past. This view affected both the cultural as well as artistic world and brought changes into the lifestyle of ordinary people. The decade of the twenties became a time of carefreeness and enjoyment, a time of loosening morals and also the time of women's emancipation.

The position of women began changing during the Great War when women had to take over men's duties. In the interwar period, women gained the right of vote in most European countries (except for France and Switzerland). The right of vote thus "clearly symbolized their human and civil autonomy" (Cuhra et al. 56, translation mine). Especially the cities' women started to realize their freedom, they became more ambitious at their studies and at work, they had a fewer children and also divorced more often than their mothers and grandmothers. Nevertheless, the women emancipation was not rooted only in various women movements who were calling for a vote and liberation (e.g. suffragettes), yet also in the move within the women's minds. As Virginia Woolf writes each woman will find a room of her own, "if [she has] the habit of freedom and the courage to write exactly what [she] think[s], if [she] escape[s] from the common sitting-room..." Women had to overcome themselves first and found their self-confidence to get a room of their own, to become emancipated.

Simon Mawer presents women's emancipation through all of his major female characters: Liesel, Hana and Kata, yet in each differently. Kata is the most emancipated of all three. She has to rely only on herself in comparison to Liesel and Hana. She literally has a room of her own, yet she needs to work to afford it. One could admit she

had no other choices, that she was pushed to become an emancipated woman by the miserable living conditions. Yet this is not exactly true. Kata had a choice. She wanted to be independent and did anything to reach it as the given extract proves.

‘Don’t you have any other family?’

Kata shrugs. ‘I haven’t seen them for years. I was black sheep who ran away to the big city’ (Mawer 140).

Liesel appears in most passages as an educated, young lady who knows what is publicly bearable. Yet readers can find some features of emancipation even in her. The most obvious is the dinner conversation with her mother about the fall of the Austria-Hungary Empire and socialism. Liesel openly expresses her ideas and nobody – neither her husband nor her father – opposes her or asks her to stop talking. On the other hand, her marriage to Viktor is definitely not a mark of emancipation. It is not a marriage of love and passion, which is something Liesel later admits to Kata, claiming she “never fell in love with Viktor” (Mawer 205). It is a marriage of contract, not in the meaning of a negotiated marriage as known at aristocrats, but rather as a marriage of mind. Both Viktor and Liesel found sympathies in each other, they share the same social class, their interests, educational background, yet not love and passion and therefore both start to find a form of escapism – Viktor in Kata and Liesel in Hana.

From the very beginning, there are many hints foreshadowing their marriage will not be without any troubles. Probably the most obvious is Liesel’s attraction to Rainer von Abt on the honeymoon – that is at time when her attention should be paid only to her husband. Mawer emphasizes every Rainer’s look at Liesel, Liesel’s awareness of her face, dress, make-up, of her nervousness. She persuades herself that “she [is] unmoved by his attention” (Mawer 21) and assures Viktor she is attracted only by him. There is a mutual tension between her and the architect – a tension which is never pictured between her and her husband. While Viktor considers her feeding Otilie “openly in front of him [to be] alien, something private between mother and child” (Mawer 55), Rainer von Abt as thrilling:

As she holds the nipple for the baby, she feels Rainer’s eyes on her like a thrilling touch. And then Otilie takes the nipple in her hard gums and there is the

particular ecstasy of her suck. Liesel looks up directly at him. ‘There,’ she says, and wonders why it is that having Rainer von Abt watch her do this so important (Mawer 49).

It is significant for her because of that strong – yet, unconscious – attraction. She also expresses her modernity and emancipation through this act, ruining fixed images that it is only a mother’s “private” occupation to take care of an infant.

Hana Hanáková represents a very liberal woman – one of those artistic bohemian muses, experienced, wise, spontaneous, and honest on the one hand, yet on the other one, sharp, wild, amoral, vulgar, vulnerable, and emotionally unstable. Hana lives her life to maximum, trying not to waste a single minute, not caring what others think, but what she wants at the very moment. While Kata is emancipated predominantly materialistically, Hana is emancipated spiritually. She enjoys liberalism and expresses her freedom in every possible way, which is something the Czechoslovak artistic circles also did – they did not express freedom only through their art, yet also through their boisterous lives full of enormous consumption of alcohol, cigarettes and in some cases even drugs, especially cocaine was popular (e.g. Hugo Haas is claimed to be addicted).

The sexual undertone of Hana’s and Liesel’s relationship is indicated a few times – when they try to determine the child’s gender, when they enter the guest room in the villa, which is described “... and then they pause outside the door to the guest room. Liesel turns the handle, then looks at Hana. ‘We are silly things, aren’t we?’ she says” (Mawer 122). Given dialogue presents how Hana’s and Liesel’s views on their relationship differ:

‘You are really impossible at time, Hanička. Why can’t we just be good friends, like we always were?’

‘We are good friends. You know that. But you know we are more than that.’

‘Special friends, then. Particular friends. But I have obligations, to my children, to my husband.’

‘Obligations sound awfully dull. What about love, Liesi?’

‘Love as well.’

... ‘And your love for me? You do love me, don’t you? Tell me that you do.’

‘Of course I do.’

‘So why can’t you find joy in it? Tell Viktor. Be honest with him’

‘He wouldn’t understand’ (Mawer 128).

Hana is bisexual and she is not ashamed of that, when she loves she loves fully. While Liesel sounds rather reserved, she cannot free herself of thoughts what the society would say if they knew about them. She feels her duty to the surroundings, because she has someone she feels she belongs to – Viktor, despite all the troubles they have. She tries to return her relationship with Hana to a pure friendship. The question is whether she really loves Hana as she claims and the obligations, society and her fear are those things that stop her from being with her, because the subsequent extract shows a rather different suggestion.

Hana leans forward and presses her lips against the warm swelling. The contact evokes in Liesel a vague and unnerving sense of sexual desire, focused not on Hana but on her own body, which is so foreign and so strange, so heavy with the future (Mawer 39).

Liesel finds sexual desire and satisfaction in Hana that she misses with Viktor, and that she was also discovering in Rainer von Abt before.

Czechoslovakia was really a liberal country, even in matters of sexual life. It was for example “a country where D. H. Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* was translated; it was actually the second translation after the German, even before the French.” (Grmelová, Higgins). Simon Mawer emphasizes the sexual freedom, captures then liberalism and emancipation, loosened morals, yet also contemporary hypocrisy - Viktor’s and Liesel’s particularly. On the other hand, Mawer loosened the morals maybe too much – not in the meaning he would depict the sexual scenes into details, but in the generalization of unfaithfulness. All his major characters – Viktor, Liesel, Hana and Kata – are either cheating on their partners (Viktor, Liesel, Hana) or are seeing more sexual partners (Kata, Hana). This can make a strange impression of the totally amoral republic, which was not true. Surely, the era was relaxed in its manners; however, people still kept their values and beliefs and looked up to their moral paragons – especially Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, whom Mawer also inserts into his novel.

Among the Czech people, Masaryk was perceived as a great authority who made the presidential office highly respectful. “The Czech society (in Slovakia the situation was not so clear) identified itself with Masaryk” (Cuhra et al. 33, translation mine). He did not focus only on the politics, yet understood he was also responsible for “the culultural and religious mood of the society” (Cuhra et al. 33, translation mine). On the contrary, Masaryk had not always been as popular in the previous times as in the republic era. Around the century, when the Hilsner Affair emerged and Masaryk condemned the idea of the ritual murder, he was denounced by the press, some of his university colleagues and his students, who even demonstrated against him. It is also important to realize Masaryk was the first president who replaced the emperor – the post of the emperor had the unquestionable and natural authority (at least officially). Therefore the part of the great respect showed to Masaryk is rooted in the absence of the monarchist authority.

Hana Hanáková is a woman who has met a countless number of personages, including Masaryk. The given passage is taken from chapter ‘Memories’, in which Hana cries over Němec who chose to stay with her wife instead of her when suddenly she and Liesel hear the news on radio that Masaryk has stepped down from office.

‘I’ll miss the Old Man,’ Hana says, attempting to distract herself. ‘I met him once, in Prague, do you know that? At a concert. We were introduced by a mutual friend. We shook hands and he looked at me, and I suddenly felt ashamed. Can you imagine that? It was as though he could see everything about me, and he forgave me’ (Mawer 97 – 98).

First of all, Mawer managed precisely to capture what some people felt in the president’s presence (as the author of this thesis proves below). However, the passage loses its effect as it is inserted violently into the novel’s story. Hana cries, readers learn about Masaryk and then she cries again. It makes an impression that every Czechoslovak remembered what he was doing at the time of Masaryk’s withdrawal similarly to Americans who recall what they did at the time of John Fitzgerald Kennedy’s assassination in Dallas. Mawer also contradicts himself, and thus also the believability of Hana as a character. Hana is a person who tells everything to her beloved Liesel, from her love life to the gossips about Vitulka Kaprálová and others. It

is highly improbable she would not tell her friend about meeting Masaryk on the very first occasion. However, Mawer described Hana's feeling and impression of Masaryk surprisingly accurately. To prove this, the author of this thesis includes the memory of the Czech actress, Adina Mandlová, of her meeting Masaryk.

Jan [Masaryk], who knew, how much I adore his father, President Masaryk, invited me in one afternoon to Lány. At that time, the Old Man was very ill and it was known he would die soon... Jan sent me to a park where I was to wait on the path for the carriage in which his father was usually taken outside to get some fresh air. I was standing there for twenty minutes or so, when suddenly a black swan appeared, broke the pond's water and started chasing me... When the carriage finally came into sight and Jan put me up to the Old Man, I was so breathless I could not speak. At that time, the Old Man had huge difficulties with speaking, especially in Czech; therefore, we spoke in English, because the English pronunciation was easier for him. After a while I calmed down of scare and it was wrath that hit me, that my first and surely the last meeting of TGM was ruined by that stupid bird. Being aware of the company of such a great man, who will die soon, I got depressed and upset so much I could not speak for crying (Mandlová 84-85, translation mine).

Similarities between Mandlová's and Hanáková's meeting Masaryk are obvious. Through his character of Hana, Mawer managed to capture insecurity, nervousness, humbleness and excitement some people felt in the president's presence.

3.5 Culture and Art

The First Republic society appears to be full of people actively involved in politics, labour unions or in culture. Comparing the then era to the previous centuries, people had more leisure time as the working hours were shortened to eight a day. People were often engaged in many organizations, groups and clubs – some of them were independent, some were oriented towards political parties. The most significant were the artistic and intellectual ones. The most prominent were left-wing *Devětsil* – a

group of avant-garde artists, *the Friady Men (Pátečníci)*, who met on Friday around five o'clock in the brothers Čapeks' house in Vinohrady, sometimes in Café Slavia. Among Pátečníci, Karel and Josef Čapeks belonged, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk visited the meetings, then Eduard Beneš, Ferdinand Peroutka, Eduard Bass, Karel Poláček or a historic Josef Šusta. The bohemian company of actors, writers and intellectuals also met at Tafelrunda, in Příklad – including Jiří Voskovec, Jan Werich, Jan Masaryk, Hugo Haas, Adina Mandlová and many others.

The interwar Czechoslovak art was really diverse. Modernism which started at the turn of the 19th and 20th century affected all cultural spheres. Democracy then guaranteed freedom of the artistic expression and the variety of the movements and the trends. The Czech and the German literature were developing independently, “to some extent, they were even in the mutual isolation” (Cuhra et al. 59, translation mine). Fine art and music were oriented mainly to France; on the other hand, many Russian emigrants were working in Czechoslovakia (probably the most distinguished is the linguist Roman Osipovič Jakobson).

3.5.1 Tourism and Sport

The First Czechoslovak Republic was the time when tourism and sport expanded. The Czech and the German tourist clubs marked out almost “thirty thousand kilometres of the tourist tracks... which exist up to the present time” (Cuhra et al. 58, translation mine). Influenced by “the stories of the Wild West” (Cuhra et al. 58, translation mine), the Czech tramping arose and with that “the first tramp camps” (Cuhra et al. 58, translation mine) which gave the basis of the later phenomenon of the Czech cottages. If the financial situation was decent, people could travel abroad – either on their own or with ČEDOK which was founded in 1920 – or they could send their children on the studies to the foreign countries (especially Paris was in fashion). Clever students could use the possibility of scholarship programmes.

In the Czech lands, tourism had patriotic overtones and so did physical education. The most significant organization was Sokol that helped young people to the

top level sports and then even to the Olympic Games⁹. Czechoslovakia succeeded especially in gymnastics, athletics, and in the water sports. Hockey and football became also widely popular. The interwar Czechoslovakia was quite successful in hockey, winning three times the bronze medal and there was even held the Ice Hockey World Championship twice in Prague (1933 and 1938). The dominating football clubs were SK Slavia and AC Sparta, and also SK Viktoria Žižkov for some time. “Football was the first sport, which radio broadcasted live (1926) and inspired the authors (E. Bass, K. Poláček)” (Bělina et al. 200, translation mine) to their literary works – *Klapzub's Eleven* (*Klapzubova jedenáctka*) and *Men in Offside* (*Muži v ofsajdu*).

Simon Mawer offers his readers a small piece of everything from the Czechoslovak cultural life. Readers thus learn about tourist tracks as Viktor and Liesel go for a walk “in the woods above the town, Liesel barelegged in short and hiking boots” (Mawer 61), about Sokol hikers who disturbed them when wanting to make love in the open air, about their regular summer visits of Marienbad, retrospectively Mawer mentions Otilie learned skiing in Tatra Mountains and also travelling abroad. Through the character of Hana, Mawer presents the cultural relation to France – Hana was studying there at the age of nineteen, and from time to time she travels there again. Also the Landuers’ honeymoon in Italy is not anything exceptional, even the fact that they travelled by car on their own without servants. The following excerpt describes their travel to Italy, “[t]here was much waiting around customs house while Viktor argues over whether he should pay an import duty on the car, and much frustration when he had to change to the left-side of the road to proceed” (Mawer 11).

If readers overlook another occasional custom control described in the book, then those who know Czechoslovak history a bit have to notice a remark showing that Viktor was frustrated as “he had to change to the left-side of the road”. The truth is Czechoslovakia drove on the left-side of the road; therefore there would be no need for frustration. It is an unimportant mistake. Yet, if the author tries to make some impression with a historical fact, he should adhere to its correctness. This error is,

⁹ In the Olympics in Paris in 1924 Czechoslovakia won “1 gold, 4 silver and 4 bronze medals, in Amsterdam in 1928 2 gold, 5 silver and 2 bronze medals and in Berlin in 1936 3 gold, 5 silver and 1 bronze medal” (Bělina et al. 200, translation mine). The last named Olympics in Berlin became the instrument of the German propaganda, the original idea of not allowing Jews and Black people to participate was finally cancelled because the other countries threatened with a boycott.

however, a result of Mawer's inattention, since after March 1939 he writes, "[t]hey set off on the right-side of the road, a new highway code, a new way of driving" (Mawer 184). During the First Czechoslovak Republic, the parliament was planning to change driving to the right (since the mid 1920's), yet there were still other things to deal with (the opposition, financial costs) and the switch was finally planned on 1 May, 1939. The realization of the switch to the right was, however, sped up by Germans, and since 17 March cars had to drive on the right-side of the road. What Czechoslovaks had planned for almost fifteen years, Germans managed to do within a day and half.

3.5.2 Journalism

The greatest influence on the wide classes had still newspapers in the interwar era. "In 1929, there were 1,800 newspapers and magazine" (Cuhra et al. 59, translation mine) which were printed only in Prague. The specific feature of the then journalism was the individual parties had their own papers or the papers sympathizing with them. The parties presented in it their programme, ideas, meetings, they commented on the political and economic affairs. Journalism was thus diverse, the individual events were observed from different points of view. The censorship existed during this time; however, it was not secret and therefore not propagandistic. If the censor imposed a ban on an article, the papers did not print it in the issue – yet, they did not print anything in the place the article should have been. Therefore, instead of the censored article, there was just a white blank space and thus everybody knew censorship had interfered.

Apart from the parties' journals, there were also independent ones, such as *Lidové noviny* and *Přítomnost*. However, the term independent is a little bit misleading, because they were not objective completely (yet, in comparison to the parties' newspapers, they really kept a detached view). *Lidové noviny* were oriented towards the Castle and young Ferdinand Peroutka (at that time only twenty-nine) was given one million Czechoslovak crowns for the establishment of his *Přítomnost* by Tomáš G. Masaryk. Another specific feature of the then journalism was many prominent writers contributed to the newspapers – for example: Karel Čapek, Karel Poláček, Egon Erwin Kisch. Apart from the serious newspapers, there were also revues and magazines

intended primarily to women, such as *Hvězda*, that was widely read – the number of its print runs reached “half a million” (Cuhra et al. 59, translation mine).

Simon Mawer often stresses Viktor’s reading *Lidové noviny*, through which indicates his inclination towards the Castle and his independence, while Liesel buys women’s magazines and fashion magazines for which Viktor often looks down to her and gets irritated as she does not know anything about this or that events, especially about growing radicalism in Germany.

In chapter ‘Interior’, Mawer proves the respected status of the Landauers within Czechoslovakia. At the moment they appear in Marianbad, they have to deal with the attention of journalists who want interviews. Viktor about his work, Liesel about motherhood in the new decade. Freedom of the then journalism can be seen in the diversity of views and reviews on their house. While some articles praises the artistic potential of the house, some criticizes its impracticality and others consider it to be “a lapse of political taste, an exercise in bourgeois excess” (Mawer 79).

3.5.3 Literature

Literature of the interwar Czechoslovakia varied in themes and movements. The dreadful impressions of the Great War became a major theme of the legionary literature represented particularly by Rudolf Medek and František Langer (both ex-legionaries). Their works stood in the contrast to the famous satirical novel *The Good Soldier Švejk* written by Jaroslav Hašek. The most prominent writer of the 1890’s literary generation was Karel Čapek. In his works he put the emphasis on free human will and combined pragmatic philosophy with moral ideals of democracy. However, the contemporary critiques sometimes reproached him for putting social issues above artistic value – as in his antifascist play *The White Disease (Bílá nemoc)* and the satirical dystopian novel *War with the Newst (Válka s mloky)*. Some people also criticized him for the strong inclination to Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk.

During the interwar era, the proletarian literature and the left-wing avant-garde were immensely developing. Many – especially young – artists inclined to communism and Marxism and called for a social and economic revolution. They organized themselves around the group *Devětsil* and journals *Kmen* and *Červen* edited by

Stanislav Kostka Neumann. Probably the most prominent proletarian poet was Jiří Wolker. Some of the left-wing artists abandoned the party after 1929 when Klement Gottwald became the leading person, yet even after that they still kept their romanticized visions of the Soviet Union (e.g. Jaroslav Seifert, Vladislav Vančura, Stanislav Kotska Neumann) – other communist artists condemned them for the withdrawal (e.g. Karel Teige, Vítězslav Nezval, Konstantin Biebel, František Halas and many others). Some artists left the party during the 1930's when the Stalin's processes happened in the Soviet Union.

The avant-garde art came through the phases of dadaism, poetism and surrealism. Poetism was exclusively Czech artistic movement that never got beyond the Czechoslovak borders. Karel Teige, his front creator, promoted the joy of everyday life, the optimistic view of the world, playfulness and the total disengagement of the art from the politics. Poetism attempted to make a life a piece of art. The poet Vítězslav Nezval and the prose writers Vladislav Vančura and Karel Konrád were influenced by poetism. André Breton's surrealism had also great impact on some of the Czechoslovak poets, especially on Vítězslav Nezval's works.

The German writers living in Czechoslovakia attempted "to capture the presence of the German culture in the Czech lands" (Cuhra et al. 61, translation mine). The most significant was the Prague German Literature whose members lived in the Czechoslovak capital, wrote in German and were often Jews – for example Max Brod, Egon Erwin Kish, Franz Kafka, Gustav Meyrink, or Lenka Reinerová who died in 2008. The quality of the German literature from the Czechoslovak borders never crossed its provincial importance. The writers inclined rather to Vienna and Berlin and expressed mainly rural patriotism in their works. Nevertheless, literature was not the only manifestation of the German culture in the Czech lands as there were many German newspapers and above all there was a German university¹⁰ in Prague where professors and students from the whole German-speaking world met.

The Landauers are the family who do not read books. At least they are never pictured so, there is no scene they would talk about some Czechoslovak writer or a

¹⁰ The former Charles-Ferdinand University split into Czech and German. In 1920, the law determined the Czech university under the name Charles University was going to be the successor of the original university and thus it could use all the historical documents and insignias. The German university remained unnamed.

writer from the circle of the Prague German Literature, they never discuss brand new novels or collections of poems. Although many musicians and composers visit their dinners and recitals, no writer or poets do so. Nevertheless, Simon Mawer mentions Karel and Josef Čapeks in his novel.

Coincidence happens. Path cross, journeys meet, lives intersect, like various progressions of articulate but entirely automatic animals, ants maybe, weaving around on a table top, moving, searching with no more sense than robots. ‘Robot’ was Čapek’s word, the linguistic gift of the Czech language to the whole world. Robot, from *robotá*. Hard labour, drudgery, the slave labour of the serfs (Mawer 156-157).

The inserted information, however, about the gift of the Czech language and the origin of the word Robot seem to be inserted into the novel rather violently and thus make a strong edifying effect. It seems as if Mawer tried to cover all the various areas of the Czechoslovak culture and educate his foreign readers like a teacher of the Czechoslovak studies. Perhaps, it would not impress the author of this thesis so negatively and unnaturally, if Mawer did not copy himself and did not present very similar knowledge in his other Czech-based novel, *Mendel’s Dwarf*.

Mendel’s father was no more than a serf. He might have owned his smallholding, but was still subject of the *Robot*. That was the world from which Mendel came.

Robot is an emblematic word. Of course it was intended to be so from the moment that the playwright Karel Čapek took it from the lumber room of the Czech language and coined its modern sense. In Mendel’s day, *Robot*, was man, not machine: three days’ forced labour out of every week of a peasant’s life... (Mawer 31)

This is not the only factual similarity both novels share. Besides the origin of the word ‘robot’, Mawer also provides his readers with the Spielber castle history in both novels, described very similarly.

3.5.4 Theatre and Film

In time of the First Czechoslovak Republic, many small theatres focusing on the avant-garde scene were founded. The classic plays were performed mainly in the National Theatre or in The Municipal Theatre in Vinohrady. The Liberated Theatre (Osvobozené divadlo) was originally established as the avant-garde theatre section of *Devětsil* in 1926. This theatre combined modern forms, a political satire and the cooperation of the actors with the audience. The most prominent actors connected with the theatre were Jiří Voskovec and Jan Werich who debuted with the play *Vest pocket revue* in 1927. The Jazzman Jaroslav Ježek joined them very soon.

The Czechoslovak silent movies were rather weak and unimportant in comparison to the world cinematography. A sound film became more distinctive and gave rise to some popular theatre actors such as Vlastimil Burian or Hugo Haas. Burian became a real star who was paid around one hundred thousand crowns for a film. His female colleagues' fees – such as Lída Baarová or Adina Mandlová – were paid around ten thousand crowns. The movies in 1930's and 1940's were shot very quickly, often within two weeks because of the costs of the materials. One scene was thus made usually once, sometimes twice, very exceptionally more times. In addition, actors and actresses had to pay for their dresses but the historical costumes. This lead along with the expensive lifestyle to the fact some actresses had to make some extra money by giving the French or the piano lessons to the rich families' children. The most significant films of the interwar era were mainly comedies, such as Karel Lamač's *Imperial and Royal Field Marshal (C. k. polní maršálek)* starring Vlasta Burian, or Martin Frič's comedies *Life Is a Dog (Život je pes)* and *Long Live with Dearly Departed (Ať žije nebožtík)* with Huga Haas. One of the most prominent drama movies became Hugo Haas' adaptation of Karel Čapek's *White Disease* released in December 1937.

The internationally most successful film was Gustav Machatý's *Ecstasy* (1933, in Czech *Extase*), starring the Austrian actress Hedy Eva Keisleer (who acted under the artistic pseudonym Hedy Lamarr). The movie tells the story of a young woman whose husband cannot satisfy her. She finally finds sexual excitement in a young engineer. After her husband's suicide, the lovers end their relationship. The woman finds a way out of the crisis in motherhood, her lover in work. The movie was made in three languages – Czech, French and German. For its erotic scenes it became very

controversial, many countries screened the version with deleted nude scenes and the film was even condemned by Pope Pius XII. Simon Mawer describes the reaction of the surroundings on Eva Mendel (Mawer uses her second name and the husband's name in the story) quite precisely. Some people did really scorn her and her first husband, Friedrich Mandl, tried to buy out as many copies of the film as possible to restrict its distribution. Hedy Lamarr finally ran away from his husband to Paris – really in disguise as Simon Mawer writes. Mawer reshapes Hedy's escape and inserts it into his novel. Hedy's rescuer is no one else than Hana Hanáková, who is a woman of its era and is acquainted with every famous personage. Mawer indicates that Hana and Hedy became one-time lovers. Nevertheless, real Hedy Lamarr got to Hollywood where she acted with such film stars of that time as Judy Garland and Lana Turner. An interesting fact is that the main role in Machatý's film *Ecstasy* was originally offered to young Adina Mandlová, however, her then partner Hugo Haas forbade her to act in it.

3.5.5 Music

The Czechoslovak music was influenced by various movements. Young generation adopted “the contemporary European modern style... and followed the German expressionists... The extensive possibilities were also found in the folklore” (Bělina et al. 197, translation mine). Besides, the era put an emphasis on “the rational construction of the musical form” (Bělina et al. 197, translation mine). Many young musicians studied at Josef Suk, for example Jaroslav Ježek or Bohuslav Martinů who left Czechoslovakia for Paris in 1923; at Vítězslav Novák who became the Prague Conservatory director and taught among others Vítězslava Kaprálová; or at Leoš Janáček who founded the Brno Conservatory, his most notable students were Vítězslav Kaprál, Břetislav Bakala or the elder brother of Hugo Haas, Pavel, because of whom Soňa Jakobson divorced her husband Roman to later marry Pavel. Pavel Haas, being Jewish, died in Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1944.

Mawer's admiration for Czech music is obvious. He inserts some of the real Czech composers into his novel – Vítězslav Kaprál and Vítězslava Kaprálová, from time to time he also names others (such as Bohuslav Martinů, Pavel Haas, Leoš Janáček, Antonín Dvořák). The Landuers are very passionate listeners, they go to concerts,

arrange recitals for friends or to earn some money for refugees, Liesel plays the piano, which was quite usual for a woman of her class.

Simon Mawer pays a special attention to Vítězslava Kaprálová. Kaprálová was a daughter of Brno's music composer Vítězslav Kaprál. From the early age she performed and composed her own music, later studied in Brno and then in Prague at the Conservatory. She was the first Czech woman who conducted the orchestra of the Czech philharmonic. Using the scholarship, she left for Paris, where she continued at her studies at a music school and at Bohuslav Martinů. She spent a lot of time in the company of the Czech artist living in Paris and there she met her future husband Jiří Mucha, the son of a painter Alfons Mucha (by the way, Hana Hanáková personally met Jiří Mucha as Mawer mentions). However, she died of tuberculosis soon after the wedding. Simon Mawer mentions her in the Author's Note and recommends his readers to find more about her – this, along with the brief presentation of her life – can make rather educative impression.

Simon Mawer, however, presents one more composer and pianist and that is Miroslav Němec – a fictional character who is not based on any real personage. Although Němec stands on the periphery of the story and appears only occasionally at recitals or when Hana talks about him, Mawer managed to describe him very precisely – with his weaknesses, talent, a dull wife, a lover, that a reader could really consider him to be a real Czechoslovak musician.

3.5.6 Fine Art and Architecture

In the fine art, the Art Nouveau was slowly dying away, although Alfons Mucha still produced under its influence and so did the secession's symbolist sculptures František Bílek and Ladislav Šaloun. The most prominent painters of the Czechoslovak cubism were Emil Filla and Josef Čapek. Surrealism influenced the paintings of Jindřich Štýrský and Marie Čermínová (known as Toyen).

The modern style in architecture was characterized by new materials (steel, iron, concrete, glass) and constructions. In Czechoslovakia, the leading person of modernism was Jan Kotěra and later his pupil Josef Gočár whose cubistic and functionalist works are one of the greatest pieces of the Czechoslovak modernist architecture. He also

contributed to the urbanism of some towns, especially Hradec Králové. Also Bohuslav Fuchs' works became the front within the Czechoslovak modernism. His most notable works are Café Zeman in Brno which one of the first functionalist buildings in the interwar Czechoslovakia and Mawer depicts it as a favourite café of Liesel and Hana in the novel, and hotel Avion.

Another notable architect of the era was the Austrian born in Brno, Adolf Loos, and his puristic architecture. Loos rejected anything in the architecture that does not have a function. He stated his thoughts in the essay *Ornament and Crime* (1910) in which he claims the ornament is a waste of time and money that could be spent more usefully. Architecture was not an art according to him. He praised harmony and function. One of his outstanding works is the Villa Müller (1928) in Prague. Along with Le Corbusier, the Swiss architecture, Loos belongs to the front European modernists. Le Corbusier's idea differed from Loos' one in that he actually considered architecture to be one of the demonstrations of art as it transcends utility. He asked for both in architecture, the aesthetic and practical side. Similarly to Loos, he also refused over-decoration and replaced it with the elegant geometry. Another significant architect of the era was Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, coming from German Aachen. Influenced by Loos' essay, he played in his works with materials and their form. He is the author the Villa Tugendhat (1928-1930) in Brno.

The Landauer Villa is based on the concept of functionalism. It denies ornaments and stresses a combination of light and dark. The most dominant feature of the house is the Glass Room. Its architect, Rainer von Abt, is a fictional character, however, Mawer sometimes puts into his mouth words of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe – the author of the model Villa Tugendhat. This is rather a paradox because Mies is also mentioned in the novel as an individual architect. “Weissenhofsiedlung in Stuttgart. Have you seen the place? Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, Behrens, Schneck. Do you know these people?” (Mawer 23). It is obvious that Mawer tries to separate Rainer von Abt from Mies; on the other hand, why does von Abt utter Mies' ideas considering himself “a poet of space and light” (Vaughan)?

Rainer von Abt is a modern architect, who could really live at that time – he has his futuristic, idealistic visions, indisputable talent, he denies ornament; on the other hand, Simon Mawer detracts on his believability as he often puts the same utterances into von Abt's mouth.

'A poet, yes; but not a poet of words. I am a poet of form... A poet of space and structure' (Mawer 15)

'I am a poet of space and form. Of light' – it seemed to be no difficulty at all to drag another quality into his aesthetic – 'of light and space and form... I capture and enclose the space within' (Mawer 16).

'... I wish to create a work of art. A work that is the very reverse of sculpture: I wish to enclose a space' (Mawer 21).

Mawer probably tries to make his readers remember the basic opinions of that time architects. However, reading these similar utterances within a few pages can make a disturbing effect.

From the modernist perspective, the Glass Room stands for reason, light, universalism and hopes to the future, for purity of lines and purity of lives. It symbolizes honesty that is required from its inhabitants. Both Viktor and Liesel mention that living in the house is like "living inside a work of art" (Mawer 80) itself. However, this idea finally transforms their lives into a kind of a stage performance – for the society outside, and worse, for each other. They try to hide from the light into some dark place where they could find some privacy, where they could experience their inner needs and fantasies. Their marriage turns out to be the deceit and the failure which corresponds to the slow decay of the republic.

3.6 Growing Radicalism and the Munich Agreement

In the first half of the 1930's radicalism was arising. While the left-wing extremism found its main support among the working class, the right-wing became attractive for the various kinds of people across the classes. The Czech fascists, "that is those who deliberately declared they were inspired by the European fascism" (Cuhra et al. 82, translation mine), comprised an unstable, yet very noisy group. The right-wing radicalism gained its support among some intellectuals, artists, partly within the

Czechoslovak People's Party. Also new organizations were established, such as *Vlajka* which is probably the best known, although it was rather a very small movement. *Vlajka* was originally founded "as an intellectual debating club" (Cuhra et al 82, translation mine) whose members were for example the professor and the philosopher František Mareš, the poet Viktor Dyk or the actress Lída Baarová. They expressed the ideas of conservatism, anti-Semitism, anti-liberalism and nationalism – for some time they even "defended the authenticity of the Manuscripts of Dvůr Králové and of Zelená Hora" (Cuhra et al. 82, translation mine). In the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, *Vlajka* openly collaborated with Nazism. Nevertheless, the Czech fascism was a very small and unstable movement, especially when comparing the situation with many other European countries. The greatest threat that endangered Czechoslovakia was coming from the Nazi Germany and the Sudeten German borders. Simon Mawer describes the first portents of the future menace in the storm metaphor.

They crowd into the space of the Glass Room like passengers on the observation deck of a luxury liner. Some of them maybe peering out through the windows onto the pitching surface of the city but, in their muddle of Czech and German, almost all are ignorant of the cold outside and the gathering storm clouds, the first sign of the tempest that is coming. They will argue and debate about trivial things, and until it is too late they will largely ignore the storm on the horizon (Mawer 78).

The excerpt refers to the early 1930's after the NSDAP's success in the German elections. In his storm metaphor, Mawer indicates the good days were slowly coming to their end; however, most people felt unconcerned until their own freedoms were endangered and curtailed. The Glass Room resembles Czechoslovakia which optimistically believed in its long existence and where many nationalities lived. The ignorance also symbolizes the indifference of many politicians – the foreign politicians as well as the Czechoslovaks – who started to solve the issue when it was already too late. On the other hand, not everybody ignored the growing radicalism. In the novel, it is Hana Hanáková who wisely foresees the good days cannot last forever. In the real Czechoslovakia, mainly journalists, writers and artists draw attention to the menace that could come. For example, Voskovec and Werich openly criticized the Italian fascism in

their play *Caesar* (1932) where they also made fun of the League of Nations which especially Edvard Beneš disapproved of and wanted the play to be forbidden for its undemocratic visions. Their another play, *Osel a stín* (1933), also had troubles with censors – the German embassy complained about Voskovec and Werich's insulting Hitler.

In 1933, the parliament passed a law giving the state the possibility to intervene in the anti-republic organizations and newspapers. The law was approved especially “against the illegal activities of the communists, against the Czech fascist and the German national socialists” (Cuhra et al. 82, translation mine) encouraged by Adolf Hitler's rise in Germany. As a result, the radicalizing German National Socialist Worker's Party was dissolved.

The Sudeten German identity was not rooted in the German inhabitants from everlasting. The political propaganda of the main Sudeten politicians attempted to unite all the Germans in the border areas and to create in them “feelings of the oppression... and the underserved poverty” (Cuhra et al. 83, translation mine) and to make them realize they are citizens of the state they had not chosen. Konrad Henlein founded the patriotic organization that promised its loyalty to Czechoslovakia and denied any connections to Hitler. In this way, Henlein's organization could legally gain new members. In 1935, shortly before the election, the organization was changed into a party and was renamed to the Sudetendeutsche Partei, SdP. The results of the elections were shocking for the Czechoslovak politics. “Two thirds of the German inhabitants” (Cuhra et al. 89, translation mine) voted for the Sudeten German Party and it won. After the elections, the Party recruited a great number of new members. “According to the estimations, every third adult Czechoslovak German” (Cuhra et. al 91, translation mine) was the member of the Sudeten German Party. After the elections, the German ministry of the foreign affairs started donating the SdP and in November 1937, “Henlein wrote a secret letter to Hitler, in which the head of the SdP agreed with the collaboration leading to the incorporation of the Sudeten areas [and] even the whole Czech-Moravian-Silesian territory to the Reich” (Cuhra et al. 91, translation mine).

At the beginning of 1938, the Sudeten German issue slowly became to be an international subject. However, no major international politician saw beyond Hitler's claiming that he just wanted to make Germans living abroad free. The western countries

did not do anything except for the formal protest when Hitler seized Austria in March 1938. The common frontier with Germany thus extended in the south.

In April 1938, Konrad Henlein declared the Carlsbad Programme in which he asked for the Sudeten areas to become autonomous within Czechoslovakia and for the right of its people to openly propagate the Nazism and its ideas. The Czechoslovak international position weakened as the German side provoked Czechoslovakia into the mobilization, yet later publicly denied any action and movement of the German army towards the frontiers.

During the summer and September the situation became increasingly worse. Adolf Hitler required more and more from day to day. In the Sudeten areas, the half-military Freikorps were founded whose members often attacked the Czechoslovak police officers and customs officers. More than hundred Czechoslovaks were killed, many were imprisoned and taken to Germany. At the end of September, the whole Europe was expecting a war. Czechoslovakia announced a general mobilisation, gas masks were distributed in London, and the French newspapers wrote the war would break within twenty-four hours.

In the evening of the 29 September 1938, Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini, Édouard Daladier and Neville Chamberlain met in Munich. Their whole night discussion resulted in the permission to the annexation of the areas with the German majority within ten days. Czechoslovakia was informed it could either accept the deal or resist Germany on its own. The Little Entente and the Soviet Union did not give any clear answers if they would help. The government finally agreed with Eduard Beneš's opinion that the potential war would be lost and only end in the ravage of the nation and therefore accepted the Pact.

Simon Mawer predominately focuses on the political situation and the growing radicalism outside Czechoslovakia, in Germany. Viktor and Oscar often discuss the worsening position of the German Jews, the Nuremberg Laws and the Zionist ideas. The Landauers also host Austrians and Germans who praise the ideas of Nazism. In the character of Liesel, Mawer illustrates the indifference towards the arising problems in the neighbouring country. However, her ignorance is rooted in the blind hopes and the foolish beliefs that the situation takes place in a foreign country and therefore can never occur in Czechoslovakia. In a certain way, this attitude reminds of Neville Chamberlain's stance on "a quarrel in a faraway country" (Mawer 174).

The inner affairs happening in Czechoslovakia and the Sudeten German issue are mentioned rather on the periphery. Mawer brings up the first mobilization in spring 1938, but only in a dialogue between Liesel and Viktor about their nanny's fiancé, the Carlsbad programme is hinted in Viktor's utterance, "[t]he so-called Sudeten German Party makes absurd demands and the Hitler government just eggs them on" (Mawer 146). Mawer tries to illustrate the worsening situation and the shouting radicals in the border areas in the Landauers' visits of Marienbad. The following excerpt depicts one of the extremist marches in the late summer of 1938.

That evening a parade of young people – men in lederhosen and knee-length socks, women in dirndl – passed directly below the windows of their rooms. The marchers were watched by an applauding crowd. *Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer*, a banner proclaimed. A band marched with them and the marcher's voices were raised in song. *Die Fahne hoch!* They sang, *Die Reihen fest geschlossen!* Further down the road was an encounter with the police, some shouting and a scuffle which ended with the banner being smashed. But still the parade went on. 'The flag is high! The ranks are tightly closed!' they sang and the people on the roadside cheered and waved (Mawer 171-172).

For a better notion of the situation and the further comparison, the author of this thesis includes a passage which depicts similar situation, yet in Carlsbad. The excerpt is taken from Sydney Morrell's memories *I Saw the Crucifixion* (1945). Sydney Morrell was a British journalist who worked as a correspondent in Czechoslovakia in 1938.

Suddenly I heard a low sound, the sound of many people singing together... They were marching towards the police station... I stood against the wall of the police station, three yards to the left of the two policemen, who never moved. The procession drew level, and the leaders set an example which the rest followed. They turned their heads deliberately towards the two policemen, still singing that forbidden song, and raised their right arms in the Nazi salute. The policemen remained still and no feature of their faces stirred. They had had their orders from Prague on no account to do anything which could be interpreted as provocation by the Sudeten Germans.... I kept my eyes on youth in particular...

He reappeared every ten minutes before the two policemen. Then he saw me. Perhaps he identified me with them. He raised his arm again. I looked at him. He raised his arm again. “Why don’t you salute, you,” he yelled at me. “Why don’t you cry, ‘Heil Hitler!’” ... He... turned his attention to the policemen. He taunted them, shouting “Heil Hitler!” into their faces. They looked at him expressionlessly. Finally, giving it up, he spat on the ground towards them and with a last, “Out with the Czechs!” sidled away. The two Czechs looked at each other, but otherwise made no move, and this time I felt sick (Morrell 126-128).

Mawer aptly describes the everyday situation that occurred in the border areas in the late summer of 1938. He depicts the facts that really happened. However, his presentation of these facts seems to be detached in comparison with Morrell’s. Mawer focuses on the factual side – he enumerates the slogans, the lyrics of the German song, he depicts the cheerfulness of the Sudeten Germans. Everything he writes is correct, yet it appears to be slightly remote at the same time. Mawer does not capture the fear, the threat, there are no emotions in his narration, and therefore his description can make a false impression of an ordinary demonstration between the police and some bunch of people. Mawer presents the mere facts like a history book does. Morrell’s advantage, on the contrary, is rooted in his personal experience. He managed to depict the furious fanaticism of the Sudeten Germans, the humiliation of the Czechoslovak police officers and the distaste of the non-participating observant.

Simon Mawer narrows the whole September time into two and half pages of one chapter in which the Landauers, Hana and Oscar listen to Neville Chamberlain’s speech in the British parliament. In fact, this is the only British notions in the whole book. He depicts the absurdity the British Prime Minister mentions in his speech – about women writing letters to his wife and to himself – and he also attempts to capture what the Czechoslovaks felt at that time. Through his characters, Mawer condemns and criticizes Chamberlain’s stance on calling Czechoslovakia a small issue. Since Mawer does not include any speeches of the Czechoslovak politicians of that time broadcasted on the Czechoslovak radio – for example the speech of the then Prime Minister, Jan Syrový – this passage can be perceived as a kind of regret and maybe apology for the British attitude during the Munich crisis.

However, Mawer does not describe any other horrors that came in September of 1938. He never depicts the general mobilisation, the time of blacking out, trying on the gas masks and taking shelter trainings, the massive demonstrations of the people who expressed their support of Edvard Beneš and the Czechoslovak politicians. After Chamberlain's speech, Mawer briefly summarizes what happened after the Pact and then switches to the Christmas time. His presentation of the time before Munich Agreement is insufficient. He does not manage to capture the chaos, the fear and the despair the whole country felt in the last week of September 1938.

4 CONCLUSION

The First Czechoslovak Republic was a country of many contradictions. Therefore, one cannot perceive it only from one point of view to capture the era properly. This stance could lead either to an excessive idealization of the time or, on the contrary, to a one-sided defamation of the system. Simon Mawer rightly writes about Czechoslovakia as about a democratic and liberal country, which rejected the totalitarian visions. He depicts the freedom of religion, the equality of women, the possibilities to travel and study abroad, to do business. On the other hand, he does not mention the problematic issues the republic had to deal with and if he does, he presents these facts as unimportant and puts them on the periphery of the story – the protection republic law, the existence of censorship, the frequent changes in politics.

Mawer presents a multicultural and bilingual family in his novel. Throughout the whole book, he emphasizes the equality of nations and their languages. He stresses how his characters switch from one language to the other, emphasizes as everything has two names in Město and makes an impression it does not matter whether you were Czechoslovak or German. However, it did matter – at least officially. Czechoslovaks lived in their own state – according to the Constitution, while the other nations were given the status of minorities, including three million Germans. Although they were given extensive rights, they were still a minority. Also, their language was not the official one and therefore its usage was limited at offices, on radio, in films. Mawer praises bilingualism of Czechoslovakia, yet he never focuses on these minority problems.

Simon Mawer predominantly portrays the life of higher social classes. The Landauers have never any economic problems, not even in the time of the Great Depression which was rather an occasional case for an industrialist and a factory owner. Mawer thus illustrates the circle of people who were not affected by the crisis. He thus puts the Depression time on the periphery. When he pictures the poor quarters and the less fortunate lower class people, he shifts his story from Czechoslovakia to Vienna. This act can make a false impression Czechoslovakia was a country where there were no greater social problems. Mawer's Czechoslovakia seems to be depicted as a country of affluence and freedom.

What Mawer manages to illustrate broadly is the cultural life of that time. He covers all the various areas – from the travelling abroad, visiting spas, hiking, music recitals, liberalization of film, to the opinion diversity of newspapers. He mentions and inserts into his novel the lives of many prominent artists and personages of that era mentions – Kaprálová, Martinů, Janáček, Dvořák, Filla, Lamarr, Mucha, Loos, Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, Masaryk and many others. However, he often inserts the names into the story too violently (in one chapter Hana meets Masaryk, she speaks about meeting Jiří Mucha in the next one, then helps Hedy Lamarr, there is a picture painted by Filla on the wall, the family listens to Kaprálová, then Liesel plays Janáček piece of music on the piano). Mawer's admiration of the Czechoslovak art is obvious; nevertheless, the excessive enumeration of the names of the various artists makes an unpleasant educative impression with Mawer's voice behind.

The Czechoslovak political situation is not dealt with in the novel. Mawer rather focuses on the situation outside the country – in Germany. He emphasizes Hitler's rise, the Nuremberg Laws, the refugees running away from Germany and Austria. However, the crucial events of 1938 that happened in Czechoslovakia are mentioned rather occasionally. Mawer presents the growing fanaticism only through Viktor's utterances what he read in the newspapers and through the family holidays in the border areas. Yet Mawer's description seems quite remote. He depicts it accurately, however, readers gain only the knowledge and the facts of what happened. Mawer does not manage to capture the fear, the chaos and the despair in which Czechoslovakia occurred in its last year of the existence.

Simon Mawer appreciates the era of the First Czechoslovak Republic and his endeavour to illustrate the life in a foreign country some eighty years ago is courageous and admirable, despite all the imperfections he made. The greatest problem of the novel is, however, that for a Czech reader it often reads like a cultural guidebook intended for foreigners – presenting facts and enumerating names, which is insufficient if a writer wants to capture the unique atmosphere vividly and colourfully.

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