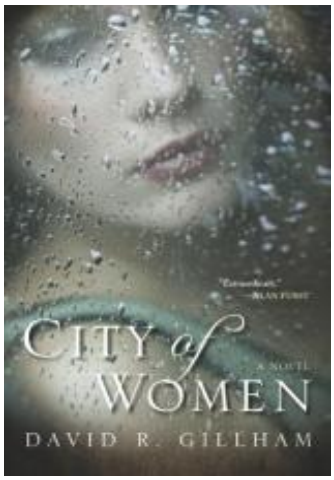
City of Women

by David R. Gillham



About the Book

It is 1943 --- the height of the Second World War. With the men taken by the army, Berlin has become a city of women. And while her husband fights on the Eastern Front, Sigrid Schröder is, for all intents and purposes, the model soldier?s wife: She goes to work every day, does as much with her rations as she can, and dutifully cares for her meddling mother-in-law, all the while ignoring the horrific immoralities of the regime.

But behind this façade is an entirely different Sigrid, a woman who dreams of her former Jewish lover, who is now lost in the chaos of the war.

Sigrid?s tedious existence is turned upside down when she finds herself hiding a mother and her two young daughters --- whom she believes might be her lover?s family --- and she must make terrifying choices that could cost her everything.

Discussion Guide

1. Why do you think Sigrid helps Ericha at the cinema in the opening of the book? If you had been in Sigrid?s situation, would you have helped Ericha? Would you have become as involved as Sigrid does? With the advantage of hindsight, our perspective is no doubt skewed; since we know the truth behind what was happening in Nazi Germany, how do our answers compare with Sigrid?s bold decisions?

2. As the story progresses, Sigrid grows more and more involved and takes more and more risks. How does her reasoning for doing so later differ from the reasoning behind her first risky decision in the cinema? What is her motivation for making these increasingly dangerous choices? Desire? Excitement? Conscience?

3. Discuss the theme of betrayal in *City of Women*. Many of the characters are guilty of double-crossing and treachery. In what ways do they deceive one another? What about Egon? Is his betrayal portrayed differently from that of others, such as Renate or Ericha?

4. Sigrid?s relationships are numerous and varied?with her mother-in-law, her neighbors, her coworkers, her husband, her lovers, the so-called U-boats. How does each of them define who Sigrid is? How is she reflected in the various relationships? How have these bonds been altered by the extraordinary circumstances of war?

5. Were you surprised by the depiction of Berlin during World War II? Before reading the novel, had you thought about what life was like on the German home front as the tide turned and defeat loomed on the horizon?

6. Countless times throughout the novel, characters risk their lives to help others?to protect the value of human life, spurred on by their own integrity. Conversely, there is the scene on the bus where no one does anything as a Jewish woman is arrested and brutalized. Which do you think is typical of human behavior? Are people more inclined to avert their eyes and try to stay out of trouble, or risk their own safety and get involved? Why?

7. If one simply observes the facts at surface value, Sigrid would probably not be considered a righteously moral individual. Nonetheless, she manages to be a very sympathetic character. How does the author accomplish this?

8. Sigrid?s coworker Renate seems to have a sensibility similar to hers. Yet when Renate discovers that Sigrid?s lover may be Jewish, her response shocks Sigrid. Was it naive of Sigrid to expect anything different? Were you surprised by how deep-seated Renate?s anti-Semitism was?

9. Often in the novel, people are not actually who they appear to be. Consider Frau Obersturmführer Junger, the SS officer?s pregnant wife who moves in down the hall: were you shocked to find out her secret? Do you feel that everyone in the book is hiding something?

10. How would you characterize Sigrid?s relationship with Ericha Kohl? Antagonistic? Trusting? Maternal? What do you think Sigrid gets from her relationship with Ericha? What does Ericha get from Sigrid?

11. What did you think about Kaspar? Egon? Wolfram? All are on the wrong side of history. Did you find any of them appealing? Are they very different from one another?

12. At one point Sigrid flirts with the idea of turning in Anna Weiss and her two daughters so that she can have Egon to herself. Do you feel she seriously considers this?

13. How important is amorous passion in the novel? Is that the driving force that motivates Sigrid? Is it emblematic of something else?

Author Bio

David R. Gillham is the *New York Times* bestselling author of CITY OF WOMEN, ANNELIES and SHADOWS OF BERLIN. He studied screenwriting at the University of Southern California before transitioning into fiction. After

moving to New York City, Gillham spent more than a decade in the book business, and he now lives with his family in Western Massachusetts.

Critical Praise

"David Gillham's excellent new novel, **City of Women**, is built on one of the most extraordinary and faithful recreations of a time in history?Berlin in World War II?that I've ever read."

? Alan Furst

"In this moving and masterful debut, David Gillham brings war-torn Berlin to life and reveals the extraordinary mettle of women tested to their limits and beyond. Powerful and piercingly real. You won?t soon forget these characters."

? Paula McLain, *New YorkTimes* bestselling author of THE PARIS WIFE

"If you enjoy beautiful story telling, gripping suspense, and a distractingly romantic plot, this is the book for you! An exciting, page turning read!"

? Kathleen Grissom, THE KITCHEN HOUSE

"**City of Women** is a big, brilliant, passionate book, a masterful evocation of Hitler?s Berlin in all its claustrophobia, duplicity, and fear. This is a thriller of searing intensity that asks the most urgent of questions?how to love, who to trust, what can be saved in the very darkest of times. I found it utterly compelling."

? Margaret Leroy, NYT bestseller THE SOLDIER?S WIFE

"Haunting and sensual, *City of Women*is a story of sisterhood and survival, of the unfathomable choices made and consequences suffered by those pushed to the brink. David Gillham has depicted a little-known aspect of the war with humanity and grace and in doing so has made an important contribution to the world of Holocaust literature."

? Pam Jenoff, international bestselling author of THE THINGS WE CHERISHED

City of Women
by David R. Gillham

Publication Date: August 7, 2012
Genres: Fiction, Historical Fiction
Hardcover: 400 pages
Publisher: Amy Einhorn Books/Putnam
ISBN-10: 039915776X
ISBN-13: 9780399157769