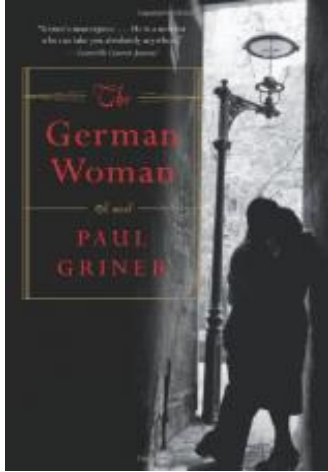


The German Woman

by Paul Griner



About the Book

This riveting war story introduces us to the beautiful Kate Zweig, the English widow of a German surgeon, and Claus Murphy, an exiled American with German roots --- two lovers with complicated loyalties.

In 1918, Kate and her husband, Horst, are taken for spies by Russian soldiers and forced to flee their field hospital on the eastern front, barely escaping with their lives. Years later, in London during the Nazis' V-1 reign of terror, Claus spends his days making propaganda films and his nights as a British spy, worn down by the war and his own many secrets. When Claus meets the intriguing Kate, he finds himself powerfully drawn to her, even after evidence surfaces that she might not be exactly who she seems. As the war hurtles to a violent end, Claus must decide where his own loyalties lie, whether he can make a difference in the war ---and what might be gained by taking a leap of faith with Kate.

Discussion Guide

1. Begin by discussing the novel's title. What aspects of a German nationality appeal to Kate? When did her English identity prove to be more valuable? As early as the first scene, Josef draws a crucial distinction between being a Lithuanian and a Pole. What other connections between war and identity are captured in the novel? To what extent do you define yourself by your ancestry?
2. Paul Griner includes graphic depictions of the suffering inflicted during both world wars. What was at the root of the gruesome nature of these war crimes? What does it take to create a mindset that chooses sadism over compassion?
3. What kind of family life does Kate experience with her mother-in-law and with her niece, Marie? How does Kate react when kindness is extended to her?
4. How does Griner's depiction of Europe during the Great War compare to his images of England during World War

II? How has Kate changed during those decades? What aspects of her mind, heart, and soul remain the same throughout the novel?

5. Griner writes, "Claus never felt more Irish than when Bertram attacked them" (page 135). How do Claus and Horst cope with stereotypes? What does the novel reveal about how enemy lines are drawn?

6. Was Kate right when she asserted that Hitler's rise to power should be blamed on the British, due to crippling policies implemented after the First World War?

7. Do Max and Claus view the world in a special way because of their work as filmmakers? What is the role of propaganda throughout the novel?

8. How were Claus and Kate shaped by their personal histories? How much are they willing to tell each other about their pasts? What does this say about their level of intimacy?

9. What do Claus's memories of his father and the Americanization Committee (page 115) indicate about the traditional American identity? Is this "whitewashing" a thing of the past?

10. Discuss the observations about collaboration with an enemy delivered on page 125. How would you define this type of collaboration? Is it easy to distinguish humanitarian acts from traitorous ones? If you were forced to choose between your friend and your country, as proposed in the epigraph, would you be able to fulfill E. M. Forster's hope, "I hope I should have the guts to betray my country"?

11. Did you believe Bertram as he tried to persuade Claus that Kate was a spy? What was the most compelling evidence against her?

12. Swales is described as a man who trades in doubt. What power does he possess simply in his ability to plant doubt and fear? Ultimately, is loyalty a weakness?

13. What accounts for Kate's stamina as a nurse? Does her role as a healer shift as she moves on to a life without Horst?

14. **The German Woman** spans both world wars, joining a long and distinguished list of classic war stories. What new insight into the complexity of war does **The German Woman** provide compared to other books on World War I, such as the *Regeneration* trilogy by Pat Barker, and on World War II, such as **Atonement** by Ian McEwan?

Author Bio

Paul Griner is the author of the acclaimed novel **Collectors** and the story collection **Follow Me**, a Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers Pick. He is the director of the creative writing program at the University of Louisville. **The German Woman** was partly inspired by an E. M. Forster quote: "If I had to choose between betraying my country and betraying my friend, I hope I should have the guts to betray my country."

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