



Stasiland

By Anna Funder

First published in 2002

Genre & subject

Biography

Non-fiction

Synopsis

In the former East there was one agent of the Stasi, the secret police, for every six citizens. What did it do to people to be so watched? And what sort of people were they, all those watchers? In her internationally acclaimed debut, Anna Funder presents with startling humour and sympathy the human face of the twentieth century's most repressive regime. Anna Funder lived in Berlin before the Wall came down. She visited Germany again after the fall of communism, and spoke with people about their experiences living under, or within, the Stasi regime. Their stories have become Stasiland.

Author biography

Anna Funder's writing has received numerous accolades and awards. Her essays, feature articles and columns have appeared in numerous publications. She has toured as a public speaker, and is a former DAAD (Berlin), Australia Council, NSW Writing Fellow and Rockefeller Foundation Fellow.

Funder is a Creative Arts graduate of University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) and produced *All that I Am* as the creative component of her Doctor of Creative Arts thesis.

All That I Am was published in the UK (where it was both *BBC Book of the Week* and *Book at Bedtime*) and Australia. It was released February 2012 in the USA and Italy.

Funder currently resides in Park Slope, Brooklyn.

Discussion starters

- Stasiland is compelling because of our need to understand aspects of political situations and people that cannot always be put into words. Along with Funder, we try to make sense of the strangeness and brutality of this world. What sense can be made? What factors led to the establishment of the regime? What factors allowed the Stasi to become so powerful?
- Why is disobedience more interesting than obedience? Is it easier to believe that humans are more capable of inhuman acts than they are of human ones?
- On page 74, Funder relates the comments of a Stasi psychologist who is '... accounting for the willingness of people to inform on their countrymen...It comes down to something in the German mentality...a certain drive for order and thoroughness and stuff like that.' Stasiland reveals that his answer is much too simple. Do you agree?

- On 4 December 1989, the demonstrators took the Stasi building. What do you find surprising about the end of the regime? What does its end reveal about human nature?
- “‘When I got out of prison, I was basically no longer human,’ Miriam says.” (p.30) The Stasi had so many ways to strip a person’s humanity; many were much more subtle than torture. Discuss the things that were taken from people under the regime.
- What conditions must exist for torture or the mistreatment of people to occur? Discuss the idea that this act aspect of the regime in East Germany can be found in many countries, western ones included. How does it become possible for people to justify brutality?
- Discuss how Funder uses metaphor to highlight irony, absurdity, pain and loss. What do we learn of Julia through her late night stripping of Funder’s apartment? How does Funder explore the world of Herr Christian, driving through his ‘neat sad forest’?
- The power of Stasiland is the aching sadness of the personal stories. Julia’s rape. Charlie’s death. Frau Paul’s separation from her son. The loss of self. How do people heal after all of this? How does a country heal after it has lost its identity?
- Is there always a necessary compromise to be made between freedom and safety? What burdens has freedom given to the people of East Germany? What freedoms have we surrendered in the west in recent times? What have we lost as a consequence?

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