

ENGLISH: *STASILAND*

Stasiland is a powerful critique of humanity's inability to deal with unpleasant realities.

Anna Funder's narrative non-fiction novel, Stasiland, a critique of totalitarianism, chronicles and explores the overbearing evils wrought upon East German citizens by the German Democratic Republic regime, as well as the difficulty for a contemporary German society to accept and confront these injustices. Central to her authorial purpose, Funder's compassionate investigations reveals a brutal history in which the Stasi bureaucracy constructed an alternative reality for its citizens, culminating in deep and lasting psychological corollaries which anchors them to their pasts. Funder's role as narrator and protagonist of the text allows her to more effectively convey the damage observed in not only the people but the entire nation, fulfilling her intent to allow readers a deeper 'perspective on this lost world'. Additionally, Stasiland delves into the psychology and incentives of humanity, demonstrating that healing and coming to terms with past traumas – although an arduous task – is a process that has already begun.

Funder's inflective journey serves as a resistance against forgetting; she demonstrates the unreliability and ease with which one's memories of the past are able to be 'filed away'. The difficulties of the current German government in deciding the fate of historical remnants including 'Hitler's bunker' and the 'Palast de Republik' shows that the implications of remembering are often too overwhelming to overcome. To destroy these relics would be a dismissal of the horrors which occurred therein; Funder suggests that to do so would be to 'run the risk of doing it all again', an event she depicts has already occurred with the establishment of GDR Germany. However, to retain the buildings as 'memorials' implies an approval and tolerance to the regimes which they symbolised. A purposeful inaction seems the least offensive solution, and Funder's journey is littered with these 'relics of the past' which incriminates the people's unwillingness to deal with the consequences of remembering. Funder's boss, Alexander Scheller, as well as his offside Uwe both reprimand Funder's proposal for an investigation. Being young citizens of a reunified Germany, the men epitomize the indifference of the Western world, who would prefer to ignore the 'embarrassing' legacy of Stasi rule and instead sweep the Germans 'under the carpet'. Moreover, it appears that politics and reputation form part of this reluctance, as Funder castigates the lack of funding and resources dedicated to the 'Puzzle Women' who are running an 'almost totally symbolic act'. It is in this way that Funder questions the integrity of not only the East but the West, presenting both sides in an equally uncertain light. Her descriptions of modern-day German youth, who drive around in 'silver black Volkswagen beetles' embellished with 'pineapple deodorant' creates a gaudy, superficial covering over the landscape of trauma which characterizes East Germany; that in their haste to forget the unpleasant realities, the people have abandoned the part of their culture fundamental to their identities. The ease with which memory can be corroded or repressed is acknowledged by Funder, demonstrating that it is an intrinsic trait for mankind to encounter difficulties when confronted with unpleasant truths.

Funder's search for the lost stories of the 'Ossis' serves to expose the injustice and meticulous evil imposed by the GDR and the Stasi, its 'sword and shield', as well as the insidious methods employed to construct a meticulous reality for its citizens. The inter-textual allusion to Alice in Wonderland is a testament to this, encapsulating the absurdity and unbelievable experiences in a world in which 'what was said was not real' and 'what was real was not allowed'. Readers are enabled a glimpse into this 'other realm' through Funder's journey as an insider, yet with an appropriate distance which adds to the authenticity of the image of the evils born. The power of propaganda is demonstrated to be one of the key ways in which the Stasi built upon their 'drem Socialist state', the strength of which has resulted in the thorough indoctrination of ex-Stasi men as well as a significant number of East Germans. Herr von Schnitzler is depicted as unreal, a caricature of his real self by Funder's hyperbolic representations of his reactions, her way of relaying the equally ridiculous belief that the 'Wall will come again'. She demonstrates that even after seven years of an existence within a capitalist society has not dampened the ex-Stasi's belief in the 'materialistic disease' which it represents and their hope that 'the most useful construction in all of German history' will return; an

with it, their former roles. Herr Bock is shrouded in the colour brown, a motif symbolising the dull practicality of a regime which provided all 'necessities for life' yet without any 'happiness or joy'. The abilities for these men to justify their past actions and to turn 'inhumanity into humanity' in the name of ideology is purposefully integrated into the text as an indication of the true horrors of humanity and the power of belief in constructing a believable reality. The disillusionment of the East Germans and their reactions present a microcosm of humanity's unwillingness to address the complexities of history.

The landscape of trauma which superimposes East German society conceals the stories of suffering which are gradually revealed in Stasiland. Funder's dual role as polemic journalist and therapist enables her interviewees an emotional catharsis, and it is through the compilation of their personal stories which detail their ways of handling their current realities. The trust and need for acknowledgement invested in Funder allows the victims to unload the traumatic psychological baggage of their pasts, which until that moment had been repressed for the memories of the fantastical reality they once lived in. Miriam is the linchpin of the novel and Funder's 'impetus for finding the others', and her story is the epitome of the terrible damage wrought by exposure to inhumanity for decades. Funder's emphasis upon Miriam's 'slight frame' and wing-bones' pan an image of a delicate and fragile individual, hence accentuating both the strength demonstrated by East Germans in the face of oppression as well as the Stasi's unhesitant decision to label people 'Enemies of the State'. Miriam's reality is actually one of 'non-history', as she is the 'living epitaph of a life that was'. It is evident, then, that there are several levels to humanity's inability to cope; outward resistance as demonstrated by Miriam, or the persevering determination which she espouses in her pursuit for the truth of Charlie's death. Furthermore, Funder proposes 'internal emigration' as a coping mechanism adopted by many who could no longer manage living in a distorted reality. Julia follows Dieter's footsteps in being 'edged out' of her reality, leading to her ostracism from society and 'withdrawal from friends [and] family'. The psychological damage sustained continue to be demonstrated in her inability to accumulate to either East or West German society, signifying a 'heartbreaking' legacy of continual suffering long after the fall of the Wall. Funder's intimate connections and compassionate characterisations of these victims alleviates the text from being a simple non-fiction journalistic collection to an authentic representation of the realities in which the victims now live. The difficulties encountered by individuals in overcoming past suffering lies not only in the cultural sphere but also manifests as mental and psychological issues.

Stasiland is an account of the trauma and suffering wrought by the absurdist spectacle that was the GDR regime and the Stasi bureaucracy. Their creation of a nationwide illusion of prosperity and equality led to lasting damages in citizens unable to accept the lies of this existence. The intricacies of memory are also described therein, as being both necessary to learn from past mistakes as well as to prevent Socialism from rising again. Ultimately Stasiland explores the potential of humanity of being capable of great evil, just as it is able to justify these evils in a continual reality which pervades contemporary Germany.

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