‘STASILAND’

(Based on Notes prepared by Mrs Jan May for VATE Inside Stories Guide)
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INTRODUCTION

Anna Funder was born in Melbourne in 1966 and completed her schooling in both Paris and Melbourne. German was a language she learned at school. She trained and worked initially as a lawyer, then as a documentary filmmaker, later completing post-graduate studies in creative writing at the University of Melbourne. In the mid 1980s, Funder was the recipient of a German Government scholarship to study at the Free University of Berlin, and in 1997 (after the fall of the Berlin Wall), she once again received financial assistance to return to Germany, spending time as a writer in residence at the Australia Centre in Potsdam, Germany. It was her meeting with Miriam Weber during this time that set Funder on her way with the book that would become Stasiland. It was published in 2002 and has won, and been nominated for, several awards. Stasiland won the prestigious BBC Four Samuel Johnson Prize for non-fiction in 2004 as well as being shortlisted for The Guardian First Book Award and The Age Book of the Year. Its success has seen Stasiland translated into numerous languages, published in many countries, and placed on school and university text lists, including VCE English/Literature and now, VCE English/ESL. Funder has recently published her first novel, All That I Am, once again set in Germany. It won the 2012 Miles Franklin Literary Award and the Indie Book of the Year for 2012. Funder has temporarily departed her Sydney home and is currently residing in New York with her husband and three young children.

One of the advantages of studying a non-fiction text such as Stasiland is the wealth of resources available to enhance its teaching. Anna Funder has been a regular interviewee, both in print and audio, runs a bountiful website, and plenty of reviews of the text are available. A must for students studying the text is to accompany Funder as she narrates a short film about her discoveries in the former GDR. The film, Stasiland—Germany is freely available online and takes the viewer right into the heart of Berlin and other settings crucial to the text. One of the most poignant moments is meeting Frau Paul in person and her adult son, Torsten; both characters whose stories are essential to Stasiland. It also gives a visual overview of many of the physical settings, including the notorious Hohenschönhausen prison and the Wall itself. Also of interest is watching Funder observe the former GDR from the window of a train, a means of transport of which she made good use in Stasiland.

Stasiland was not immediately published in Germany despite its excellent reception in Australia and winning a major British literary award. Twenty-three publishers in Germany rejected the book, one telling Funder: ‘This is the best book by a foreigner on this issue. But unfortunately, in the current political climate, we cannot see our way to publishing it’. When Stasiland was eventually launched in Germany, Funder chose Leipzig’s Runden Ecke, the building where she first thought about writing down the stories of victims of the Stasi, for her book launch. She describes the reactions at the launch as mixed. Her publisher’s speech about ‘betrayal’ was received in silence and later a woman in the audience asked Funder who had given her ‘the right to write a book about us’. Her Australian heritage as well as a view that she was unnecessarily digging up stories from a past, preferably left there, unsettled some. One negative review about the book, written by a German, questioned her view of Berlin: ‘When not retelling other people’s stories, her description of Berlin life doesn’t ring quite true. The Berliners she meets by chance … are caricatures. She makes things stylish in a morbid way, painting country and people even greyer than they are. This tends to cast doubt on other things she has to say’. Tellingly, Funder found the reception to her book launch and tour to be far warmer in the former West Germany.
This brings us to the question of what motivated Funder, an Australian, to write *Stasiland*. She had studied in Berlin during the late 1980s, fascinated by the demarcation of the capitalist West and the communist East. The Wall became an object of curiosity, heightened by people she met, mainly writers and artists who had been expelled from the East. She wondered what sort of country would kick out its best and brightest. Funder loved her time in Berlin, returning in 1994 to study at the Free University and then again two years later, determined to write a book about the stories she had collected. Funder, visiting Leipzig for the first time in 1994, felt the former East Germany still ‘felt like a secret walled-in garden, a place lost in time’ (p. 5). Her curiosity to see evidence of the vast apparatus of what had been the East German Ministry for State Security led her to the Stasi Museum in the Runden Ecke, where the offices have been left just the way they were in late 1989: shredding machines, Communist insignia on the walls, a document about ‘Signals for Observation’, fake wigs, miniature recording devices and smell jars captured Funder’s imagination. But the story about Miriam Weber and the suspicious death of her husband in a Stasi remand cell, told to her by the guide, embedded itself in Funder’s mind.

In 1996, Funder, unable to get Miriam’s story out of her mind, is back in Berlin, this time with a part-time job in television and determined to find stories ‘from this land gone wrong’ (p. 9). Her aim is to hear the East German side of what happened in the GDR, particularly the stories of those who stood up to the regime or those for whom the fall of the Wall was not welcomed; in other words, stories of the men who worked for the Stasi. As Funder pursues her stories we gain a sense of the narrator of our journey taking on the role of an investigative journalist. She becomes ‘Anna in Stasiland’ curiously seeking her way just like Alice in Wonderland, meeting some endearing, some quirky and some rather scary characters on her journey. The reader becomes Funder’s companion as she places her ad seeking ex-Stasi men in the paper, visits numerous museums, archives and even prisons, answers and makes phone calls, catches trains to various destinations, drinks too much and observes the world in which she finds herself in great detail. We listen in on Funder’s interviews with victims of the regime, feeling her fluctuating emotions of sadness, shock and admiration, and sense her change in tone and responses while speaking with men such as von Schnitzler and Herr Bock. We alternate between sympathy, a chuckle, irritation, anguish and heartache. In a recent interview, Funder talks about how hard she found mixing interviews with ex-Stasi and those she cared about. She found von Schnitzler the hardest of all but felt it necessary to find views such as his: ‘I wanted to explore what it is like to believe in something as fervently as people believe in religion—in this case communism—and then have that world around you cease to exist.

*Stasiland* gives a sense of a country in some ways still divided and struggling with its identity. Although the physical entity of the Wall no longer exists, many of those she interviews are still walled in emotionally. The stories of Miriam (and her late husband Charlie), Julia, Frau Paul and Torsten, and Klaus suggest that each deals with their past experiences in different ways. Some are still fragile, struggling to find their place in the world and thus, the telling of their story to Funder is a painfully raw experience. When asked in an interview about Miriam’s life post-*Stasiland*, Funder said she is now reluctant to speak out and ‘just wants to have a relatively easier life’. She describes Miriam as a ‘very extraordinary and funny and tragic woman. But it was also emblematic of what happened during the regime, and also how it was being dealt with, or rather not dealt with, after the fall of the Wall’. Funder’s horror-romance fascination with the GDR continues as she gives us insight into the motives and methods of the Stasi through her encounters with the men who
respond to her advertisement. Listening to these men, some of them still absolutely convinced in the merits of communism and the evils of capitalism raise many questions for the reader—and also the need for some explanation to VCE students of the ideological battle fought by East Germany. A knowledge of why the Wall went up is needed to understand why the Wall fell in November 1989 (even if some of the ex-Stasi interviewed by Funder still cannot themselves quite work out why it happened).

There are so many concerns raised in Stasiland. There are the ‘big’ questions about what it means to be human, about love and loss, loyalty and betrayal, political ideologies and the ability of the GDR regime to place a wall overnight between itself and its neighbour. As well, there are some other questions to consider about human nature. Why do some follow orders so blindly? In contrast, why do others follow their conscience instead? And a key question pursued by Funder is why some in the old East Germany are nostalgic for their old lives behind the Wall? Why do some long for the past, while others long to forget?
REVIEWS OF ‘STASILAND’

‘The spy's the limit’ by Giles MacDonogh (The Guardian), 7 June 2003

The Australian Anna Funder was working in television in Berlin in the mid-1990s when she became interested in the Stasi - the former East German ministry of state security. She wanted to know if East Germans had been capable of individual acts of resistance but the notion was brusquely dismissed by her West German colleagues: "Ossis" were not brave, but craven - and stupid to put up with the regime.

Funder decided to find out for herself. By placing an advertisement in a newspaper she arranged meetings with a number of old Stasi-men, including the noble renegade Karl-Eduard von Schnitzler, who once hosted a notorious television program running down the west. She found them living in the same drab houses in compounds on the outskirts of Potsdam; the same stained Plattenbauten - or high rise blocks - in East Berlin; and frequenting the same pubs they did in their glory days. The only difference was they now had plenty of time on their hands.

There is much humour and even affection in her portraits of the handful of Stasi-men she meets. Hagen Koch, for example, whose council flat is now a museum to the old regime, has covered the walls with mementoes, such as a dress uniform of an officer in the elite Felix Dzerzhinski regiment - East Germany's equivalent of the Prussian First Foot Guards. Koch was a model citizen who mapped out the Berlin Wall, but something went badly wrong when his superiors began to meddle with his marriage. Funder shows that the Stasi-men like Koch were also victims in their way.

The GDR was a furtive and insidious tyranny. Through the Stasi it pried into every aspect of your life. It possessed armies of spies, paid and unpaid. Some estimates run as high as one for every six and a half members of the population. Any attempt to achieve success in East Germany involved a pact with the devil - you paid with your soul if you wanted to attend a university, enter a sports-club, become a lawyer or a clergyman or marry a foreigner - like Funder's friend Julia. You could only avoid contact with the regime if you opted out, and went into "inner emigration" - not an option for the ambitious.

This was a regime ruled by dour old men - Marxisten-Senilisten. For the most part the party leaders were Saxons - a revenge on Prussia for its earlier domination of Germany. An exception was Erich Mielke, the head of state security. He was a Berliner, wanted since 1931 for shooting a policeman. After 1989 he was put on trial and served a few years of a token sentence.

It must have been a pen-pusher's heaven. The Stasi had files on everybody; most of them would have made dull reading. Any foreigner who exchanged his or her 25 Deutschemarks for the same number of useless Ostmarks and entered the Russian sector might have ended up with a dossier in Berlin-Lichtenberg.

I was befriended by "Detlef" in the Bärenschenke pub in Berlin's Friedrichstrasse. He showed me round the hospital where he worked as a porter. He didn't want me to have an unbalanced view of Prussian history and to that end proposed sending me articles from the "impartial" East German press. After November 9 1989, the packets stopped coming.
Detlef was possibly no more than an "unofficial collaborator" - and unpaid stool-pigeon. The Stasi possessed much larger forces than the Gestapo, but they were not its equals in terror. It is true that some 43,000 people died in concentration camps in the Russian zone before Stalin's death put an end to the more murderous years of the GDR, but even that monstrous tally is small compared with the Nazis'. After July 20 1944 about 5,000 were killed, of whom perhaps only 200 were connected with the plot to kill Hitler. Funder finds evidence of about 20 to 30 secret burials in Leipzig - but over how long a period? The 1,000-year Reich lasted 12 years, the GDR 40. Since 1989 the border guards who opened fire on those who sought freedom in the west have been brought before the courts, but not I think, many junior Stasi-men.

Like the Third Reich, the GDR posed as a Rechtsstaat - one governed by the rule of law. In theory at least, torture was as illegal under Hitler as it was under Honecker. It was however, a brave man or woman who drew attention to the brutality of East German prisons. All this and much else comes wonderfully to life in Funder's racy account. The real heroes of the book and of the resistance are Miriam and her murdered husband Charlie. Miriam, a reluctant citizen of the GDR, whose story runs as a central strand throughout this gripping book, has reason to be bitter. East Germany cannot die for her while its bogeymen are still living in the same flats and drinking in the same pubs.

‘The German Democratic Republic of spying’ by Anthony Glees (The Telegraph), 7th July 2003

The East German security police, the notorious Stasi whose reign of terror ended when the Communist system collapsed in 1989, was the offspring of two separate traditions of state repression, Nazi and Soviet. The camps and prisons from the Gestapo system, and some of the policemen too, were transmogrified into instruments of Communist oppression; the Soviet KGB became the model for the subsequent practices of the Stasi once the East German state was up and running.

This ancestry perhaps explains why by the 1980s the Stasi had constructed a police surveillance system second to none, one so thorough that there was an agent or informer for every 180 East Germans. This apparatus generated an unimaginable amount of paper as agents remorselessly chronicled the most humdrum and pointless of activities, intercepted the most innocent of letters, and spent months trailing political suspects while following absurd but detailed instructions on how to play the nonchalant passer-by.

The whole system would be a laughing-stock were it not for the fact that hundreds of thousands of unfortunate East Germans, most innocent of any political crime, were arrested, interrogated, routinely tortured and sent to prison camps and psychiatric hospitals. East German Communists were even more determined that their Soviet mentors to eradicate any vestige of anti-Communism. Repression was never called that by name: the Stasi saw themselves as revolutionary heroes, saving a Communist Germany literally on the frontline of the Cold War from defectors and infiltrators.

This is the bizarre world captured in a fascinating book by a young Australian writer, Anna Funder. Her moving journey through liberated eastern Germany after the Wall came down is told through the voices of surviving witnesses form both sides - victims and Stasi.
operators. It is written with rare literary flair. I can think of no better introduction to the brutal reality of East German repression.

Like the Third Reich that preceded it, the East German system depended on the active participation of thousands of ordinary citizens who shopped their friends, workmates and colleagues to the authorities. Police states depend upon collusion, not simply upon coercion, which may explain why the society Ms Funder is trying to understand has never indulged in mass trials or truth commissions.

When the secret police were not monitoring their own society they turned their eyes on the West. Anthony Glees has spent much of the past decade uncovering the world of East German espionage in Britain. The fruits of this trawl through the surviving Stasi files now closed to researchers, tell an extraordinary story (The Stasi Files, Free Press, £20, 461 pp).

From 1973, when Britain recognised the East German state, the GDR's embassy at 34 Belgrave Square was home to a number of spymasters who helped to recruit and run a network of British informers, some genuine pro-Communists, others just gullible and garrulous.

What the Stasi wanted to do was to get information on British military and foreign policy, while at the same time trying to influence groups and individuals to pursue ends compatible with East German interests. The results were perhaps less alarming than Glees suggests. The rather sorry mixture of dons, teachers and pacifists on whom the East Germans relied numbered only around 100 (which scarcely justifies his claim that Britain was "riddled" with Stasi agents). For the most part they had little hard information to yield, and most seem to have had little idea that they were in fact informers. The handful of true spies betrayed few vital secrets.

Glees takes MI5 to task for failing to unmask the network and it is clear that British intelligence failed to devote the same degree of effort to this corner of the Cold War as the Stasi were prepared to grant it.

The British connection was more important for what it meant to the poor East Germans who were the victims of Communist fantasies about subversion and conspiracy right up to the fall of the regime. One of Funder's witnesses, Miriam Weber, tried as a teenager to crawl through the wire and over the Wall to West Berlin. She was caught on a trip-wire, brutally interrogated and eventually imprisoned. "You could have started World War III", announced the judge who sentenced her.

The Stasi flourished on such nonsense, and were encouraged to do so by mischievous foreign fellow-travellers who remained blind to the harsh realities of the Communist utopia right to the end. Anyone who harbours any lingering sympathies for this dreary and self-important dictatorship, should read both these books forthwith.
NON FICTION TEXTS IN ENGLISH

Anna Funder’s *Stasiland* can be understood as a type of creative nonfiction, literary journalism, where factual material is shaped into an engaging narrative. As you study *Stasiland* you will need to consider how Funder blends her factual material, with many literary techniques more commonly found in fictional writing.

Consider how *Stasiland* exhibits many of the genre features listed below.

Creative non-fiction is a relatively recently recognized “genre” that involves **writing from personal experience and/or reporting on other peoples’ experiences**. The best creative non-fiction work usually involves conducting a **considerable amount of research**, most often “in the field,” involving oral history interviewing, participant observation, detective/sleuthing work, as well as jumping into new adventures. The range of possible topics is virtually unlimited, and this type of writing actually has a very long history. Creative nonfiction encompasses memoir writing, biography and autobiography, oral history, and inspired reportage on almost any subject. **It involves writing about actual events in your own life and/or others’ lives, conveying your message through the use of literary techniques such as characterization, plot, setting, dialogue, narrative and personal reflection.**

The reviews of Stasiland identify this blending of fiction and non-fiction techniques as key to the power of the reading experience. Consider the excerpts below:

*What’s more, Funder also takes a rather nonconventional approach to assembling her narrative. There are times when Stasiland does not feel so much like a memoir of the GDR’s secret police as it does a memoir of a woman who is writing a memoir of the GDR’s secret police. At first this insertion of herself and her research methods into the story felt a little intrusive and narcissistic. But over time, the reader realizes how key it is that we see just how Funder goes about assembling her story. That method, in its own right, tells a lot about how the Stasi presence continues to hold a grip over the subjects of this book.*

*In the years following the collapse of the Berlin Wall… the destruction wrought amongst the lives of ordinary East Germans remained, to some extent, sadly ill-documented and under acknowledged in the reunified Germany. Indeed, it is largely at this point that Funder’s *Stasiland* takes up the story in an attempt to *document and understand* the lives of both victims and protagonists in the aftermath of the Stasi maelstrom. *Stasiland* is undoubtedly creative non-fiction at its most riveting best. Indeed, it is also testimony to Funder’s curiosity, tenacity, and novel-like story telling ability which sustain the *intensity and engagement* with such *dark and gripping themes*. Fired by an insatiable desire to tell the stories of both victims and perpetrators alike, *Stasiland* reflects Funder’s unquenchable desire to expose the consequences of her "adventures in Stasiland;" *where truth really was stranger than fiction.*
A key feature of literary journalism is the presence of the author in the text and the role they play in the narrative. How might the description below apply to Anna Funder in Stasiland?

The defining mark of literary journalism is the personality of the writer, the individual and intimate voice of a whole, candid person not representing, defending, or speaking on behalf of any institution, not a newspaper, corporation, government, ideology, field of study, chamber of commerce, or travel destination. It is the voice of someone naked, without bureaucratic shelter, speaking simply in his or her own right, someone who has illuminated experience with private reflection, but who has not transcended crankiness, wryness, doubtfulness, and who doesn’t blank out emotional realities of sadness, glee, excitement, fury, love. The genre’s power is the strength of this voice. It is an unaffiliated social force—although its practice has been mostly benign. It is one of the few places in media where mass audiences may consume unmoderated individual assertion, spoken on behalf of no one but the adventurous author.

Mark Kramer, ‘Breakable Rules for Literary Journalists’, pg. 28
CHAPTER REVIEW AND QUESTIONS

Berlin, Winter 1996

By opening in the first person, Funder immediately places herself in the unpleasant Alexanderplatz station, a claustrophobic and dirty environment. The repressiveness she feels in such a small designed space will continue to echo through the whole of Stasiland. She is alert to the smells of antiseptic; the use of the olfactory senses is a device Funder uses constantly. The lady working in the toilet possesses an attitude of ‘Berliner Schnauze’—‘It’s attitude: it’s in your face’ (p. 2). The first reference to the Berlin Wall is made; ‘it was one of the longest structures ever built to keep people separate from one another’ (p. 2). Funder establishes the drab, grey atmosphere of the old East Berlin while revealing that she had previously lived in West Berlin in the 1980s prior to the fall of the Wall. Her memories shift between her 1989 visit, her first post-Wall visit in 1994 and the present of 1996. More is revealed about Funder. She likes the ‘sticklebrick’ nature of German having learned the language back in Australia. She feels hung over from a pub session the previous night but has headed to Leipzig, through the crooked, mish-mash of streets, to the Stasi museum, formerly the Stasi offices, to see the vast apparatus of the GDR’s Ministry for State Security. Funder observes the offices, left just as they were on 4 December 1989. There are displays of photographs, details of observation methods, smell sample jars and ‘frighteningly neat’ desks. Frau Hollitzer, the guide, tells her about Miriam Weber whose husband died in a nearby cell. Funder has not been able to get Miriam out of her mind and has decided to look ‘for some of the stories from this land gone wrong’ (p. 9). This opening chapter has introduced us to Funder, our narrator, through whose eyes the reader will view events. Her motives are clarified, her writing style with its focus on detail and sensory perception is established and Miriam, whose story will provide a key thread throughout the text, is introduced, but not yet met.

Questions

1. What sense do we get from this first chapter of East Germany and the Stasi?
2. How do Funder’s descriptions add to this?
3. What is the emotional reaction of readers to this first Chapter?
4. What fascinated Funder about the Stasi and their stories?
Miriam

Funder’s job at a TV station involves her answering queries stemming from broadcasts. One letter makes her wonder what it would be like to be German, inspiring Funder to raise the question of the puzzle women at a meeting where she proposes running stories about people who stood up to the regime or resisted the dictatorship of the GDR. Her colleagues are not particularly interested, arguing that people find the whole ‘Stasi thing’ embarrassing and are reluctant to discuss the past, so more personal point-of-view stories are not on the TV stations agenda. The American letter writer angrily responds that history is made of personal stories, a response that further encourages Funder’s search for stories. Funder meets Miriam, who has never told her story to a stranger before, in Leipzig for the first time. Miriam, a small slight woman, lives in a top floor apartment building with views over the city. As Funder notes with irony: ‘From here you could see anyone coming’. This comment becomes increasingly meaningful as we learn more about Miriam’s past experiences. In 1968, aged sixteen, Miriam and a friend, inspired by protesters in Leipzig, distributed homemade leaflets around the town saying, ‘Consulta
tion, not water cannons’ and ‘People of the People’s Republic speak up!’. Funder observes that this action was so harmless but Miriam reminds her that it was a crime of sedition at a time when the government controlled the distribution of all information. Miriam and her friend, Ursula, are caught by the Stasi after a search of Miriam’s house reveals some of the little stamp letters from the children’s stamp set they used caught in the carpet. After a month of solitary confinement with no visitors or even a book to read, and each girl being told the other had admitted, they confessed and were let out to await trial. On New Year’s Eve 1968, Miriam makes the drastic decision to go over the Wall.

Questions

1. Explain the reaction when Funder suggests a story about the lives of former East Germans?
2. Given the events post WWII, what is particularly surprising/interesting about the way the Germans dealt with the fall of the wall in 1989 and its aftermath?
3. What does the beginning of Miriam’s story tell us about the attitude of young people in 1968 and the reach of the Stasi?

Bornholmer Bridge

The tension in this chapter is palpable as Miriam reveals the story of her escape attempt to Funder. She notices Bornholmer Bridge from the train, a place where the wire wall comes very close to the railway line with garden beds in front. When Funder compares her antics to those of Peter Rabbit in Mr McGregor’s garden, they share a laugh but the reality
is that Miriam still has the scars from the barbed wire fence on her hands today. She uses a piece of paper to show her escape route, angrily marking X on the spot where an unseen trip wire foiled her escape. However, Miriam is proud of her efforts in managing to get past a guard dog that fails in its duty to attack her. Even the Stasi could not work out how she got past the dog, for which Miriam ironically feels sympathy. Funder tells the reader: ‘The Stasi let her have it’ (p. 24). She reveals the terrible sleep deprivation torture endured by Miriam and how after eleven days, Miriam, in desperation, concocts an absurd story that the Stasi believe. It takes two weeks for the Stasi to see through her fiction but in the meantime, Miriam has been able to sleep. She is sentenced to eighteen months in Hohenschönhausen prison.

Questions

1. What paradoxes are apparent in Miriam's story of escape and capture?

Charlie

Miriam endures brutal treatment in prison: ‘When I got out of prison, I was basically no longer human’ (p. 31). As she reveals her torture in a cold bath, her voice breaks and Funder wonders if the Stasi beat something out of her that she didn’t get back. Prisoners were referred to by number only, criminal prisoners allowed to abuse political prisoners, a barter system operated for basic needs like tampons, and the confined atmosphere left Miriam’s nerves frayed. She now takes the doors off where she lives and likes open plan living. The first mention of Charlie, Miriam’s husband, is made. Miriam meets Charlie after her release from jail. When shown a photo of him, Funder has to restrain herself from asking why Miriam has cut herself out of the photo. The reader’s curiosity is also further heightened as more of the story is revealed. Charlie and Miriam live together but are subject to regular Stasi scrutiny. Charlie works as a writer, mainly for underground publications and had a small book published in West Germany. A kindly elderly neighbour stores their important documents because of the house searches to which they are subjected. Miriam recalls with amusement the time when a young Stasi man found Animal Farm, a banned book, on the shelves, but assuming it was simply an animal story put it back. The Stasi control their lives in other ways. Miriam is not allowed to study; she cannot get a job and resorts to selling photographs to friends in order to make a meagre living.

In 1979, after Charlie is placed under formal suspicion of helping Miriam’s sister and her husband escape in a car boot, he and Miriam place their applications to leave the GDR, knowing they will attract extreme scrutiny. Charlie is arrested on 26 August 1980 and held in a remand cell. Miriam gains authorisation to visit him but on 15 October a policeman, in a matter of fact style, informs her that Charlie is dead. The official story is that he hanged himself but Miriam’s constant inquiries draw a range of differing stories and she is not permitted to see his body in the morgue. Legal assistance is difficult to obtain, Miriam learning the regime seems to control all aspects of the law. She fights the Stasi
arrangements for Charlie’s funeral, insisting on a burial rather than cremation, and finally gains permission to view Charlie’s open coffin, albeit through a thick, tinted window, but enough for her to see no evidence of strangulation marks. The Stasi, photographing and recording the proceedings, dominates the funeral and Miriam suspects that the coffin they buried may well not have contained Charlie’s body at all. She persists in calling the Stasi every month with questions about Charlie’s death and burial, taking the Stasi preoccupation with the coffin as an admission of guilt but knows that she is powerless under the regime. Finally, in May 1989, Miriam has her identity papers taken from her and is deported to West Germany. However, her deportation is eleven years too late, and only six months before the fall of the Wall. Funder observes: ‘For Miriam, the past stopped when Charlie died’ (p. 44). Her existence is no longer real, more a living epitaph to a life that was. Miriam places hope in the puzzle women of Nuremberg finding out something about Charlie amid all the shredded and torn pieces of files. Her requests for information from the post-Wall administration have not been acted upon and her only pleasure is that the Stasi have ceased to exist, their offices now a museum.

**Questions**

1. What do the circumstances of Charlie’s death suggest about the way the Stasi operated?
2. Why did Miriam return to Leipzig?
3. Funder describes Miriam as “brave and strong and broken”. In what way is she these three things?

**The Linoleum Palace**

Funder is deeply affected by Miriam’s story, emotionally and physically. Back in her Berlin apartment, she discovers her landlord, Julia, removing yet more possessions from the broken down, linoleum floored rooms. Funder uses her apartment as a metaphor for the lack of beauty and joy in East Germany itself. Buildings are old and neglected and the government simply do not know what to do with some of them. She wonders: ‘To remember or forget—which is healthier?’ thinking of the changed street names, the western trams now running through streets of East Berlin and the bakers’ shops now selling luxury baked goods like donuts and cheesecakes (p. 52). Funder places an advertisement in a Potsdam newspaper seeking former Stasi officers and unofficial collaborators for interviews: ‘I am curious about what it must have been like to be on the inside of the Firm, and then to have that world and your place in it disappear’ (p. 53). She is going right to the source to satisfy her curiosity.

**Questions**

1. In what way is Funder's apartment a metaphor for what is happening in the former GDR?
**Stasi HQ**

Funder receives immediate feedback to her advertisement. She refuses one man, an informer who asks for money but arranges meetings with several others. Feeling stifled at home, Funder heads to the Stasi Headquarters, now a museum, but once home to Erich Mielke, the Minister for State Security. People go there to read their ‘unauthorised biographies’; the files kept about them by the Stasi. Much of this chapter considers the role of Mielke and some of his cronies in the establishment of the GDR, a regime that in the end ran the Stasi—an organisation 50 per cent bigger than the nation’s army. The GDR became known as ‘the most perfected surveillance state of all time’ (p. 57). There were 97,000 employees and 173,000 informers. Funder is astonished to realise that there was one Stasi operative for every 63 people. As she wanders around the museum, Funder contemplates Mielke’s background, provides detail about his childhood, early membership of the Communist Party, his flight to Moscow, and subsequent training by Stalin’s secret police. The post-World War II GDR regime enabled his return to East Germany, and with his friend, Erich Honecker, Mielke rose to a position of great power. Funder paints Mielke and Honecker as ‘ossified’ elderly men with no interest in reform, eventually alienating many of the East German populace who were starting, by the late 1980s, to take to the streets. They ignored Gorbachev’s advice for reform and once Hungary cut a hole in its border with Austria, creating the first hole in the Bloc, there was no turning back. Funder describes the candlelight protest of 70,000 East Germans outside Stasi HQ on October 9 1989 and the subsequent fall of the Wall on October 17: ‘it was all over, and people from East and West were climbing, crying, and dancing on the Wall’ (p. 65).

Questions

1. Make a timelines of the events leading to the collapse of the GDR.
2. Why did the GDR leadership refuse to listen to Gorbachev?

**The Smell of Old Men**

This chapter shifts forward several weeks, capturing the panic in the Normanstrasse HQ. Funder describes the desperate attempts by the Stasi to shred as many documents and files as possible. She, in ‘tongue-in-cheek’ style, writes of the irony of Stasi men heading into West Berlin to buy more shredders as their own collapse through overuse. Once the shredders gave out completely, files were torn by hand and placed in bags, the same ones now being pieced together by the puzzle women. By 3 December 1989, Mielke was expelled from the Party and a month later, demonstrators, who had built a symbolic wall of rocks around the building, invaded Stasi HQ. Mielke subsequently served a six-year prison sentence but was released.
on health grounds and still lived in Berlin at the time Funder was writing. Funder continues her story of the aftermath of the fall of the Wall, describing the debate amongst Germans about what should be done with Stasi files. The West German government wants them locked away, the East Germans are aghast at this suggestion. After reunification in October 1990, the newly formed Stasi File Authority was formed, allowing the East German public access to their files. The building reopened as a museum, displaying what Funder calls ‘revolutionary kitsch’ such as hidden cameras and microphones. She watches a video in which a psychologist interestingly suggests the German mentality, and its drive for order and thoroughness, encouraged people to inform on neighbours. Funder leaves with the phone number of Frau Paul, given to her by the guide upon expressing her desire to talk to people confronted by the regime. She also records the words of a cleaner describing the museum’s smell when it first opened: ‘It was the smell … of old men’ (p. 74).

Questions

1. Why did the opening of the Stasi files cause such controversy?
2. Is "it was just my job" a defense?
3. How was it possible to create "two very different kinds of Germans"?

Telephone Calls

A phone call from Miriam suggests that she is reticent about meeting Funder again. Funder observes: ‘If I were Miriam and had told the most painful and formative parts of my life to someone, I’m not sure I’d want to see that person again either’ (p. 76). She meets Herr Winz at a hotel to hear his Stasi story, recognising him because of the rolled-up magazine he carries. Seemingly still into spy games, Winz wants to see Funder’s ID card and is shocked to hear that Australians do not possess them. Her passport suffices in his eyes and Winz spots that she visited the GDR in 1987, before the Wall fell. Refusing to show Funder his own ID, Winz has brought a copy of The Communist Manifesto with him, explaining his work in counter-espionage at the Potsdam Ministry. He now belongs to a group of ex-Stasi men, the ‘Society for the Protection of Civil Rights and the Dignity of Man’, who supposedly aim to present an objective view of history in order to combat the lies and misrepresentation they feel are spread by western media. His obvious pride in his Stasi work takes Funder aback, especially as he persists in making the beauty of socialist theory the centre of discussion. Winz views the West as the ‘foe’, spreading propaganda against the former regime. He is adamant that people miss the safety of the GDR and eagerly awaits the second coming of socialism. Funder’s portrayal of Winz is essentially a caricature as she describes his insistence at inscribing the copy of The Communist Manifesto for her and his belief that ‘Capitalism will not last!’ (p. 87). The chapter closes with Funder leaving a message on Miriam’s phone, wondering if her pursuit of Miriam is inappropriate; that she has already been hounded enough. But Funder is intrigued by Miriam’s story: ‘Does telling your story mean you are free of it? Or that you go, unfettered, into your future’ (p. 87). This question permeates the whole book.

Questions

1. What might explain the disillusionment with Capitalism?
Julia Has No Story

More snippets of information about post-Wall East Germany are woven into the discussion. Drinking and homelessness were not problems before the Wall came down; now they are, as witnessed by Funder everyday as she passes those sleeping in parks and stations. Julia has let herself into Funder’s apartment again to water the plants and find some old love letters. Her tentativeness and fragility make Funder compare her to a hermit crab, whisking back into its shell at the slightest sign of contact. Julia starts to reveal some clues about her past. She had an Italian boyfriend and was followed by a black car. Her words; ‘Things can end so badly’ and ‘At least I thought it was the police’, signal to Funder that Julia’s claim to ‘no story’ is code for a ‘long story’ (p. 93). She invites Julia to stay for coffee, which becomes a meal as the story of Julia Behrend is gradually revealed. Her parents, both teachers, tried to exist within the confines of the state, knowing what could be said in and out of the home; a pragmatic approach to life. Julia’s father found it harder than her mother to acknowledge fiction as fact, ultimately broken by living for so long suppressing how he really felt about having to comply with the state. In order to survive, some people had to make choices ‘…between seeing things for what they were in the GDR, and ignoring those realities in order to stay sane’ (p. 96). Julia’s goal as an adolescent was to be an interpreter, her fascination with foreign languages leading her to write letters to the outside world in Russian, French and English. She wanted to show that life in the GDR was no so bad, without the drugs, homelessness and prostitution of the West. Her nostalgia rather than bitterness about the regime intrigues Funder who senses that Julia has a story that will be very difficult to tell.

Questions

1. What were the generational differences when the Wall came down?
2. What fictions were acknowledged as fact?

The Italian Boyfriend

Julia meets her boyfriend at the Leipzig Fair when she is sixteen. He is thirty and working for a computer firm. They maintain a long distance relationship, holidaying annually in Hungary and speaking by phone once a week during the two and half years they are together. His visits were accompanied by intense surveillance and Julia knew that her phone calls, booked through the authorities, would be monitored. Academically clever, particularly in languages, Julia is sent to a distant boarding school; a move she feels was a deliberate tactic by the authorities to isolate her. Students were forced to watch the East German news each night as well as ‘The Black Channel’ that we learn more about in coming chapters. The headmaster tries to persuade Julia’s parents to influence her to break off the relationship with the Italian boyfriend. Although unhappy, her parents will not stop her. After Julia matriculates with straight A grades, she is unable to gain entry into university or get a job of any kind, observing ‘That was when it got hard for me’ (p. 103). She senses that the Stasi are responsible and encounters a blatant lack of sympathy at the Employment Office when told that unemployment doesn’t exist in the GDR. As Funder observes, ‘By no fault of her own, Julia Behrend had fallen into the gap between the GDR’s
fiction and its reality’ (p. 105). She had been loyal to the state, but now was being edged out of the reality because of her relationship with a westerner. She tells the boyfriend the relationship is finished after a holiday where the relentless surveillance and his controlling personality become too much for her. Julia withdraws, without hope, into a private exile.

Questions

1. Explain GDR logic.
2. Why did Julia fall into the gap between the GDR’s fiction and its reality?
3. Why did the Stasi feel the need to control Julia?

Major N.

This chapter takes us into the next part of Julia’s story. Funder immediately places the reader on edge by emphasising Julia’s words: “There are some things”—she stops. “I don’t think I’ll be able to remember this. I haven’t remembered this” (p. 106). The reticence and pain of recalling the past is palpable. Julia is summoned to the police station to renew her ID, but sent to Room 118, where she finds Major N., the Minister of State Security. Her fear escalates as he questions why she is not working. He has in front of him all the letters written by Julia to the Italian boyfriend. The Major asks her to translate the English, stopping to question the meaning of specific words. Funder, as narrator, interrupts to express her outrage, and also her guilt at living a relatively lucky life in Australia to the reader. He knows every detail of Julia’s life; her school subjects, parents, sister’s hope to study at a music conservatory, although ironically, Major N. doesn’t seem to know that Julia has broken-up with the Italian. When he proposes that Julia help provide the Stasi with information about her ‘friend’, she is honest: ‘He wanted to own me. I knew if I stayed with him I would not be able to determine my own life’ (p. 112). Once again, the irony of these words resonates with the reader. Julia is unable to determine her own life anyway. Departing with Major N.’s phone number, she realises that her choices are limited; either ‘she could be in, or she could be out’ (p. 112). The Stasi are doing everything possible to control her and she leaves feeling desperately alone and separate from everybody. Julia reveals to Funder that she feels most damaged by the total surveillance. Her lack of a ‘private sphere’ was a terrible way to live, and only now can she appreciate just how psychologically damaging the whole episode was, as well as her repression of events. This raises one of the over-arching questions in the text; is it better to dig up the past or let it lie? Julia shares her Stasi experience with her parents and sister, realising that at only twenty years of age, her best option is to leave for the West. The alternative is to become an informer. Encouraged by her parents, Julia phones Major N. to refuse his offer and tell him they are complaining to Honecker. This strategy works and is a small victory for Julia. The next week she has a job. The narrative shifts back to the present as Julia admits she wants the box of letters to aid her visits to a psychotherapist. Funder reflects on the difficulties of destroying the past and the incalculable damages life events can inflict, knowing that she hasn’t yet heard Julia’s entire story: ‘No-one can tote up life’s events and calculate the damages; a table of maims for the soul’ (p. 117).
Questions

1. What was Major N's motivation for his intimidation of Julia?
2. Why was "total surveillance" most damaging?
3. In what way(s) is it not "ever, really, over"?

The Lipsi

After a discussion with her work colleague, Uwe, in which he is fairly dismissive of the hate mail towards the GDR received at the station, Funder observes to the reader that 'Everyone, always, is claiming innocence here' (p. 116). She finds this position difficult to digest and enlists Uwe's help to track down Karl-Eduard von Schnitzler, the chief propagandist of the regime. Funder details von Schnitzler's work on 'The Black Channel' that was broadcast from the East from 1960. He became the most hated face of the regime, parodied by those who saw through the strategies of the regime. Funder finds the TV archive building, firstly having to get past two guards who seem to be playing some absurdist comedy routine with her. Frau Anderson, who shows her around the archive, clearly still loyal to the state, nostalgically laments the loss of the Wall. Funder tells us the new term for this nostalgia is 'Ostalgie'—nostalgia for the East. The building is another grey, inhospitable, concrete monolith, typical of the 'all-purpose' buildings constructed by the regime and Funder wonders at the range of activities that must have ensued behind all the doors; anything from interrogation to administration to the production of propaganda. She spends several hours watching old tapes from 'The Black Channel', a 'hygiene operation' to cleanse out West German television. One tape shows two people being shot trying to escape over the Wall. Funder wonders at this man, von Schnitzler, who 'turned inhumanity into humanity, these deaths into symbols of salvation' (p. 125). Another tape reveals the Lipsi dance, a dance invented by a committee, supposedly to draw East Germans away from the immoral dance moves of the West. The description of the Lipsi dance is reminiscent of a Monty Python skit; absurdist and ridiculous, linking back to the feelings aroused in Funder as she entered the building. Emotions are further heightened when Funder wrongly thinks she has been locked in to the building for the night: panic momentarily consuming her. A week later, Herr Winz provides Funder with von Schnitzler's phone number, allowing her to arrange a meeting.

Questions

1. Frau Anderson suggests that many of the old regime are "turncoats". what does this suggest about their ideology?
2. What role did Propaganda play in the stability of the East German regime?

Von Schni

The meeting with von Schnitzler proves to be one of Funder's most difficult. The tone of her narration, as well as her asides and references to his moods, position the reader to dislike von Schnitzler from the start. Funder, who has used the excuse that she is writing a biography, tells us this man is seventy-nine years old, was nicknamed 'Filthy Ed' and possesses the belief that nearly everything written about him is false. His background is
explored in some detail but the start of his propagandist career was in England as a prisoner of war, making broadcasts for the BBC—*German Prisoners of War Speak to the Homeland*. Upon return to the British Occupied Zone of West Germany in 1945, von Schnitzler made more broadcasts but was sacked due to his Communist views. He crossed to the Soviet zone in 1947 and broadcast in the GDR until October 1989. Von Schnitzler is insistent that Funder hears his whole life story, becoming angry when she tries to fast-forward to ‘The Black Channel’. He justifies his role as part of the Cold War, demanding that Funder understand the history first. She recognises him as a ‘bully’, as von Schnitzler alternates between patterns of shouting followed by bouts of calm reason. An ironic moment takes place when he fiercely declares his hatred of the western TV show *Big Brother*, forgetting that the GDR carried out mass surveillance of its population. Rupert Murdoch is condemned as a ‘global imperialist’ (p. 133). Von Schnitzler’s responses to Funder’s questions about the Wall are angry. She asks him if the killings at the border were an act of peace and if he now views the Wall as something humane. He screams more than ever: ‘It was absolutely necessary! It was an historical necessity. It was the most useful construction in all of Germany’s history!’ (p. 134). His defence of the Wall and the regime is loud and loyal. Von Schnitzler is a true believer and still believes he is beloved for his work against imperialism to this day. The only ground he gives is to disagree with ‘ridiculous’ GDR success propaganda when the state was obviously suffering economically. However, Funder notes his ability to switch ‘from one view to another with frightening ease’ when he agrees propaganda did in fact distance people because it was so far from the reality (p. 136). She wonders if it is because he is so accustomed to power. Von Schnitzler rejects Funder’s statistics about collaborators arguing that only 10 per cent of the claimed numbers actually worked on the GDR population. Finally, he returns to the threat of imperialism: ‘The Wall was necessary to defend a threatened nation. And there was Erich Mielke at the top, a living example of the most humane human being’ (p. 137). Stunned, Funder is told the conversation is over. Her final gesture is to give him a pin of the Australian and German flags; however, it is the wrong flag for von Schnitzler. It is not the flag of the GDR.

Questions

1. What does Funder discover in her interview with Von Schnitzler?
2. What does his attitude suggest about the GDR and its legacy?

The Worse You Feel

The title of this chapter is indicative of how deeply emotional the telling of Julia’s story is for her, and also Funder as the listener. Julia comes for lunch—Funder notices she has taken up smoking again. Julia is tentative answering Funder’s question about her response when the Wall fell. Julia experienced it ‘intensely’ because of all she went through, raising the subject of her therapist’s theories about why she is unable to submit to authority: ‘I just can’t have structure imposed on me’ (p. 140). Once again, in this chapter, as she converses with Julia, Funder accentuates the darkness, greys and browns, of the apartment. These oppressive, lifeless colours complement the story of oppression told by Julia. Suddenly
Julia reveals that she was raped soon after the Wall came down. The police were unsympathetic and disinterested, offering her no protection. Afraid, unable to study, feeling separated from everybody, Julia spends a semester as a teaching assistant in San Francisco. Upon return, she had to face the man who raped her at his trial, a shattering experience for someone already so fragile. Sinking into depression, contemplating suicide, and unable to get out the door, Julia stops eating: ‘I could not see how I could go on and live a life in this world, let alone a normal life’ (p. 143). The fall of the Wall exacerbates her terror again; she is convinced the rapist had been released by mistake in the 1990 amnesties. Julia’s experiences, highlights again to Funder just how essential the telling of the stories of ordinary people are. How do normal people cope with such things in their past? Funder finds herself enormously unsettled by Julia’s story, seeking respite in a drinking session with Klaus. A morning visit to the pool makes her further question her presence in such a ‘chaotic’ city as well as reminding her of the drugged GDR swimmers who unfairly beat Australian swimming champions. She is ejected from the pool after being told off for swimming on a bathing only day. ‘So this is orderly chaos’, reflects Funder as she alludes to the pool as the ‘subconscious of the country: the mess that gives rise to all that order’ (p. 147). It is a country of too many rules and a city standing on the old fault-line of East and West.

Questions

1. What are some of the difficulties the GDR had transitioning to a democracy?

Herr Christian

Funder heads by train to Potsdam to meet Herr Christian, a former Stasi man. He takes her, in his sleek BMW, on a tour of sites where he operated; the Coding Villa where phone transcripts from car phones and police walkie-talkies in the West were intercepted and a bunker where leading Stasi would have hidden in case of nuclear war. Herr Christian has a sense of humour, making fun of some of his Stasi activities and claiming he worked for them because of an acute sense of duty to obey the law. Now a private detective, he recounts his own experience of being informed on. He was locked up by the Stasi for three days and demoted for having an affair that a friend reported to his superiors. After further punishment working on a building site for a year, Herr Christian becomes a covert security officer on Stasi buildings. He recounts to Funder how they hunted out cars that might have stowaway East German passengers organised by smugglers. Funder has fun with his admission that he enjoyed wearing disguises, particularly as a blind man: ‘Yes, being a blind man is the best way to observe people’ (p. 154).

Questions

1. Explain the irony of the need for "Berlin to know everything."
2. How does Herr Christian view his role with the Stasi?
Funder’s next meeting is with Hagen Koch, who in August 1961, as a new Stasi recruit, painted the line where the Wall would go. He was only twenty-one and Erich Honecker’s personal cartographer. His apartment draws close attention from Funder. She is mesmerised by the maps, pennants, and other regime memorabilia on display in Koch’s own ‘Wall Archive’. Koch compares his upbringing in the GDR to being raised in a religion, making Funder wonder if a closed system of belief ultimately creates its own punishments, especially when dealing with a past that is now all over. She reflects back to her Catholic school days and her own struggle to make sense of Catholicism, noting ironically that the Stasi ‘had a lot more sons on earth to help’ see inside your life than God (p. 158). Koch epitomises the GDR efforts to create a ‘Socialist German Man’; however, the story Funder draws from him exposes an intriguing family background. His father, a member of the German army from 1929 to 1945, became caught up in the division of Germany after the war. His home city of Dessau was given to the Russians, who immediately nationalised—and subsequently plundered—their share of Germany. History was quickly remade as Germans in the East ‘became’ innocent of Nazism and the Russians embarked on creating a new socialist state. Koch’s father retrained as a teacher becoming involved in local politics; however, his bid for the position of mayor was derailed by the Communist candidate labelling him a ‘fascist imperialist army soldier’, a ‘crime’ which sees him sentenced to seven years as a POW. Funder reveals her shock when Koch tells her of the blackmail tactics used on his father. His choice was to join the Socialist Unity Party and see his wife and family again or stay with the Liberal Democrats and expect life in prison. Funder’s choice of ‘wife and life’ is exactly the choice made by Heinz Koch. Under the watchful eye of the local Communist Party, he teaches children the doctrine of Communism, but when arrested again after refusing to promote the Free German Youth movement, (organised in a similar way to Hitler Youth), Heinz Koch’s hand is forced again by the party. His own son, now being interviewed by Funder, has to join before he can be released. Herr Koch becomes, in December 1946, the first child in the area to wear the kerchief and goes on to become ‘… a Musterknabe, a poster boy for the new regime’ (p. 165). Koch also tells Funder the absurdist story of GDR children collecting beetles in return for ration cards, as the regime fed propaganda to its populace. American and British planes dropping supplies to West Berlin were supposedly spraying potato beetles! People swallowed this story because they were cut off from the outside world and had nothing else to believe: ‘This story—of insects and sweets and the making of an enemy—is the story of the making of a patriot’ (p. 167).
Questions

1. In what way was the GDR a religion?
2. How was the Socialist German different from the Nazi German and the Capitalist Imperialist German?
3. How and why did the East Germans make themselves innocent of Nazism?

Drawing The Line

This chapter shifts us into the world of the adult Herr Koch starting his career with the Ministry of State Security in 1960. He is handpicked by Erich Mielke to direct the Drafting Office for Cartographics and Topography. However, his Stasi career is not all easy going. A girlfriend is deemed inappropriate by authorities and her parents are horrified at his work. Koch and his girlfriend simply elope. He approved of the Wall in 1961 believing that the West was robbing the East by enticing its workers with higher wages and then buying cheaper goods in the East. The GDR was losing 3000 people a day by 1961, losing its skilled labour force in droves. Funder lightens the tone by comparing the decision to build the Wall as an ‘anti-fascist protective measure’ to a prophylactic (e.g. condom) protecting the East from the western disease of materialism. Koch’s story, as the twenty-one-year-old cartographer who drew the white chalk line across the street with Honecker beside him, weaves into Funder’s narrative of the events that took place on the night of Sunday August 12, 1961. The barbed wire was rolled out and people awoke to find themselves cut off from relatives, work and school. Koch, who could have easily stepped to the other side of his chalk line, did not. Reminiscent of his father’s choice, he chose love; he’d been married for three weeks. After losing his cartography job because he fails to tell the Stasi about his biological father’s visit from Holland, Koch decides he wants to get out of the GDR. His plans are foiled when he is arrested on a trumped up charge of producing pornography. His wife, not allowed to see her husband and afraid of losing their young son, is blackmailed into divorcing her husband. Koch is devastated when shown the signed divorce papers in prison: ‘At that moment my world broke apart’ (p. 174). He is released from prison after signing a document retracting his resignation and renewing his pledge to lifelong service to the regime. Angry and bitter towards his wife, it takes eighteen months before he realises the truth and they remarry. However, his Stasi files refer to the negative influences of his wife and his ‘inconstancy’ to the party.

Questions

1. In the view of East Germans way was the building of the wall necessary?
2. What struggles did Koch have to come to terms with in terms of his past?
3. In what ways were the Stasi able to manipulate Herr Koch’s circumstances to suit their purposes?
The Plate

In 1985, Herr Koch is denied permission to attend his father’s funeral and transferred out of the Stasi into the regular army. His private revenge, when leaving, is to take a plate pinned on the office wall: ‘My little private revenge...That plate was all I had the courage for’. Its removal is noticed and three weeks later his old section head comes to collect the plate. Koch denies taking it. Funder takes the reader through a sadly comic account of the Stasi’s search for this plate as they establish the ‘Working Group on Plate Re-Procurement’. Koch is pursued but manages to hide his ‘trophy’ and after the Wall comes down, pins it up in his study. However, the saga is not yet over. In 1993, a TV interview, filmed in Koch’s home, is broadcast with the plate in the background. He is visited by men overseeing the fire sale of GDR assets, wanting the plate returned—an asset worth only sixteen marks. Finally, Koch triumphs over them but the whole plate episode did come at a cost; being cast as a thief and the loss of his wife’s job. But he feels it was all worth it. The chapter ends with a return to the Miriam story. Koch has given Funder diagrams and photos of the Bornholmer Strasse border installation and she feels a pull to visit the place where Miriam attempted her escape. Retracing Miriam’s steps, Funder ‘put her fingers through the wire’ and held the fence that once Miriam climbed.

Questions

1. In what ways did the absurdity of the GDR continue on after the fall of the Wall? What accounts for this?

Klaus

Until this stage of the book, Klaus has been referred to as Funder’s drinking buddy, but he has a story of his own to tell. The Klaus Renft Combo was one of the most popular bands in the GDR. The members listened to illegal music from the West, incorporating it into their own performances. Funder expresses amazement that they were allowed to play the Rolling Stones ‘Satisfaction’. Klaus tells her that the authorities didn’t know what it meant. However, every song written by the band had its lyrics scrutinised and changed by the Stasi before it could be recorded. As their songs increasingly tried to ‘scratch the GDR at its marrow’ (p. 186), the Combo were restricted as to where they could play. Performing in country areas, they became increasingly aware of the façade created by the regime and increasingly determined to sing about the truth. Klaus tells Funder, ‘This society, it was built on lies—lie after lie after lie’ (p. 187). The regime pursues him, offering a move to the West if he gets rid of two other band members. Later, after the fall of the Wall, Klaus discovered more about the ‘downfall’ of the band on his Stasi file, even a suggestion by Mielke that they be ‘liquidated’. Every detail of their lives was recorded; how
much they drank, belching into the microphone and even the use of the word ‘shit’. Finally, the band is told ‘…you don’t exist anymore’ (p. 189). Klaus secretly recorded this meeting with the Stasi and smuggled the tape to the West, threatening that if anything happened to them, it would be immediately played on western radio. Funder shifts to a narrative detailing subsequent events; the overnight removal of all Renft records, the rewriting of musical history without them, the manager who turned out to be Stasi and the imprisonment of two members until they were ‘bought’ by the West. Klaus was allowed to go to West Berlin where he worked as a soundman. An intriguing mystery raised is the death of the band’s writer from a rare cancer. We hear the suspicion that Stasi used radiation to mark people and objects it wanted to track. The Klaus Renft Combo reformed post Wall, the last track on their new CD being the recording of the meeting where they were told they no longer existed. Surprisingly, Klaus isn’t angry: ‘He seems incapable of regret, and anger evaporates off him like sweat’ (p. 191). Funder is surprised to hear he believes the Stasi have been punished enough, making her ponder their capacity to have a conscience. She recalls Herr Winz, Herr Christian and Herr Koch ‘and the different kinds of conscience there are’ (p. 192). Klaus differs from Miriam and Julia; he has stopped being bound to the wounds of the past. The chapter closes with his words: ‘You can’t let it eat you up, you know, make you bitter. You’ve got to laugh where you can’ (p. 193).

Questions

1. What did the Stasi fear from the Klaus Renft Combo?

Herr Bock of Golm

It seems convenient that the next story comes after that of Klaus. Herr Bock was a professor at a Stasi training academy, teaching ‘Spezialdisziplin’, the science of recruiting informers. Funder again uses her quick eye and descriptive skills to paint Bock’s house, overwhelmingly a place of brown and beige, even his clothes. Bock tells her the Stasi was designed to defend the government against the people, somewhat of an irony to the astute reader. Despite a population of only 17 million, 15 Stasi divisions were established through the GDR and informers infiltrated every aspect of society. Bock claims 65 per cent of church leaders were informers and that the use of informers at demonstrations made groups appear stronger than they really were. He takes Funder through the four main working methods of the Stasi and tells her the definition of ‘enemy’ became wider as time went on, in fact ‘too wide’ according to him. Funder lets the reader know her cynicism about his definition of qualities required in an informer, disagreeing with Bock’s claim that the ability to betray was vital to Stasi work. She is curious about why people became informers, Bock replying some were convinced of the cause but mainly because they felt ‘somebody’: ‘They felt they had it over other people’ (p. 201). Funder considers what she calls the ‘psychology of the mistress’; the small deep human satisfaction of having one up on another. Bock now works as a business adviser, mediating for West German firms buying up assets in the East. He finds it hard to understand what happened in 1989: ‘It would not have occurred to anyone that our country could somehow cease to be. Just like that’ (p. 202). Funder’s departure from Herr Bock’s house is uneasy as she waits in the dark for a taxi, this ex-Stasi man appearing to deliberately disconcert her.
Questions

1. What is ironic about the essential role of the Stasi and the qualities of a Stasi informer?
2. How does Herr Boch explain the reason why people would not refuse to inform for the Stasi?

Frau Paul

We are introduced to Frau Paul to whom the guide at the Stasi museum was adamant Funder should speak. She has even prepared notes on her life for Funder who describes her home as ‘spick and span’. Frau Paul titles her notes ‘The Wall Went Straight Through My Heart’ and proceeds to tell the sad story of her son, Torsten, born very ill in January 1961. Unable to be properly diagnosed and treated in an Eastern hospital, Torsten is transferred to the Westend Hospital in West Berlin where he is immediately operated on for his life-threatening stomach condition. Torsten is released in the July, needing a special formula preparation and medications obtainable only from the West. Even though the Wall didn’t exist at that stage, Frau Paul and her husband still needed border sector permission each time they crossed. She weeps recalling the events of August 12-13 when the Berlin Wall was rolled out in barbed wire. The family awoke to a changed world where permission was now refused to collect the baby's formula and medicine. One cruel official even told her Torsten would be better off dead. The new diet affected the baby badly, necessitating hospital admission, but when Frau Paul arrived to visit the next day, Torsten was gone, spirited over the border by the doctors trying to save his life. The regime made the next few years tortuous for the family. Husband and wife were not allowed to visit the West together in case they failed to return and the emotional demands of not having regular contact with their sick baby took their toll. They started looking for ways to leave the GDR. Frau Paul emphasises to Funder that she wasn’t a classic resistance fighter, a criminal or member of a political party, but just a mother wanting to be with her only child. Contact is made with Michael Hinze, a student in the West who helps get people out of the GDR. He was part of a clever scheme that extricated people via the rail system using altered western passports. Frau Paul and her husband make arrangements to escape but sadly, they receive a signal that the plan must be aborted. The Stasi, who subsequently took steps to stop such escapes by train, caught the group before them. Frau Paul and her husband abandon escape plans but allow the three students who were to leave the GDR with them to stay in their home.

Questions

1. What does Frau Paul's circumstances suggest about life for the ordinary East German and the Stasi mentality?
2. Why is the distinction of not being a resistance fighter important for Frau Paul?
The Deal

Frau Paul’s story continues. We learn about the next escape attempt of the three students, involving a tunnel dug under the Wall from the cellar of a house backing onto the border. This complicated escape plan involved coded signals to ensure everything progressed smoothly. As Frau Paul relates the story, Funder intrudes into the narrative with her own observations. She has already visited the place where the tunnel was built, able to cajole a workman into taking her down into the cellar. The first student, Coch, finds three Stasi waiting for him in the cellar, Frau Paul’s husband witnessing at a distance, Coch being taken away. Funder also flags to the reader, at the time of writing, she has more information than what Frau Paul is prepared to reveal, leading to a reflection upon what memory hides, alters and reveals—a key theme in the text: ‘Memory, like so much else, is unreliable. Not only for what it hides and what it alters, but also for what it reveals’ (p. 215). The couple are followed by the Stasi and two weeks later Frau Paul is snatched off the street and interrogated at Stasi HQ for twenty-two hours. She is offered a deal; help them catch Michael Hinze and she can see her son. Frau Paul remembers Fricke, a western journalist and broadcaster, similarly entrapped by the Stasi and dragged across the border to prison. The West was unable to get him out but immediately on his release, he broadcast the story of his abduction. Frau Paul decides she can’t trap Michael: ‘I had to decide against my son, but I couldn’t let myself be used in this way’ (p. 220). Funder reflects on the courage of Frau Paul and how the woman in front of her is now a ‘lonely, teary, guilt-wracked wreck’ (p. 221). There was no good outcome, no right answer in such a situation. Her husband and the three students were still arrested.

Questions

1. What does the foiled escape attempt suggest about the Stasi?

Hohenschönhausen

The story continues. Frau Paul and her husband are held in Hohenschönhausen prison for five months, never knowing their charges or judgement until five minutes before their trial. The students were transported to Rostock on the Baltic Sea for trial, away from possible western media coverage. Twenty-nine years later, Frau Paul finally sees her file. There is no mention whatsoever of Torsten and she is accused of being a constant listener to ‘NATO smear-radio’. She and her husband receive sentences of four years hard labour. The sorry saga is further personalised when Frau Paul takes Funder to the Hohenschönhausen prison where she is now involved in preserving it as a museum. Once again, Funder focuses on the greyness, lack of windows and ventilation, and the intensely oppressive nature of the prison. Her host locks her in a prison van so she can experience how it feels. Funder admires Frau Paul’s bravery in being able to return to such an awful place: ‘But here she is in the place that broke her, and she is telling me about it’ (p.
(p. 225). They visit the room where she was made to sit for twenty-two hours on a small wooden stool. Funder’s description permeates the reader’s senses: ‘This U-Boat smelt of damp and old urine and vomit and earth: the smell of misery’ (p. 226). The tour also passes small compartments used for iced water torture, completely dark concrete cells and others lined completely with black rubber. Funder thinks of the water torture contraption as ‘Pythonesque’ then suggests the offices were the place where Stasi truly came into their own: ‘as innovators, story-makers, and Faustian bargain-hunters. That room was where a deal was offered and refused, and a soul buckled out of shape, forever’ (p. 227). Frau Paul was allowed visits by her mother four times a year in prison, while Torsten remained in the Westend Hospital, tended by the staff. A letter, sent by one of the doctors, managed to make its way through in November 1963 reporting on his good progress. Michael Hinze, who only recently learned about how Frau Paul’s connection with his freedom, expresses his gratitude, while explaining to Funder why he doesn’t need to feel guilty about her actions. Frau Paul hasn’t quite told Funder all of her story—that she and her husband were very committed to getting people out of the East—however, Funder understands her reasons. She sees herself as a criminal rather than a hero or dissident. ‘This seems to me the sorriest thing; that the picture she has of herself is one that the Stasi made for her’ (p. 229). In August 1964, Frau Paul and her husband are bought free by 40,000 western marks; however, rather than being released into the West, they are stripped of their ID and dumped in an East Berlin street. There were only 9 of 34,000 people bought by the West not delivered, and unfortunately, they were two of them. Torsten finally comes home in late 1965, nearly five and failing to recognise his mother. Frau Paul’s sad and confused emotional state as she tells this part of the story reduces Funder to tears as well. We learn that Funder has met Torsten who admires his parents’ actions. Torsten developed his own strategies when older to bypass the Stasi, smuggling music parts into the East for the electronic music scene. He was also encouraged to become an informer; however, his 1985 Stasi file cited him as unsuitable because he participated in ‘criminal activity’. Although conceding that his life has been shaped by the Wall, Torsten is determined not to play the ‘if only’ game, living life as it comes. Funder ends the chapter with a reference to ‘Mauer im Kopf or the Wall in the Head’. She realises that some Stasi men live in hope that the Wall may return some day, while for victims it is a terrifying possibility.

Questions

1. Why was being an accessory to an attempt to flee worse than the crime itself?
2. What view does Frau Paul have of herself and why is this described as “the picture the Stasi made for her”?
3. In what ways does the Wall still exist?

Herr Bohnsack

This is the final Stasi man interviewed by Funder. Bohnsack is unusual—he is a Stasi man who ‘outed’ himself. His work responsibilities lay in ‘disinformation and psychological warfare against the West’ while overseeing the overseas espionage service of the regime (p. 236). Known as Division X, its members wore suits
rather than uniforms, were highly educated and able to travel abroad. All scorned Mielke. Bohnsack, trained as a journalist, leaked information, manufactured recorded conversations and spread rumours about the West. Once he was told off for telling an inappropriate joke about the Titanic at lunch: ‘…the GDR wants the band that played as it went down’. He tells Funder that the worst jokes about Mielke weren’t jokes at all; they were true. Mielke once made a four-hour speech in October 1989, at the height of demonstrations and unrest, while his guests nibbled on delicacies normally unavailable in the East. Bohnsack relates his version of events in late 1989. His division was ordered to work and made to simulate a war situation even though they knew the GDR was lost. Mielke told them the people were the enemy, saying ‘It’s them or us’ (p. 239). Bohnsack and his colleagues knew if they disobeyed orders, they’d be shot, but also were aware of what may happen to them when power was lost. However, once Mielke stood down from the leadership in the last days, his men lacked the ability to give orders themselves; they were so used to receiving them. Bohnsack, on his own initiative, spends three days feeding files into his family’s old baker’s oven, watched by a suspicious neighbour. Funder returns the narrative to the present, in Bohnsack’s pub where he’d always been a regular. After the Wall fell, some at the pub, suspicious of his past Stasi activities, want him gone. He tells the publican that he can’t take back the past. Threatened with exposure after the media get hold of a disk containing names of the top paid Stasi, Bohnsack outs himself to the western newspaper. By breaking the unwritten Stasi code of honour, he is seen as a traitor by former colleagues and ostracised.

Funder reaches a turning point in her investigations as the chapter draws to a close. Her mother, back in Australia, is seriously ill with cancer and Uwe, her boss, drives an upset Funder to the airport. She has left a message on Miriam’s phone but in the coming months her energies are devoted to her mother, who dies nine months later. Funder describes how ‘grief came down on me like a cage’ and it would be three years before her return to Berlin (p. 244).

Questions

1. Why did Herr Bohnsack “out” himself?
2. What was particularly absurd about the way the Stasi operated in the last days of the GDR?
3. Why does Bohnsack destroy his files?

Berlin, Spring, 2000

The reader is now shifted forward in time to a different version of Berlin. It is springtime and a green, perfumed city. Funder details the flowers and trees, a contrast to her earlier emphasis on the city’s grey bleakness. Coincidentally, her old apartment is available again although it has been made virtually unliveable by the previous tenants. Julia is now living in San Francisco, working in a feminist bookshop. She has told Funder by email that America seems to honour...
its victims in a way that Germany failed to do. Miriam has not responded to a letter sent from Australia. Sitting in the local park, Funder reflects that nothing much has changed. The homeless men are still there, one of them telling her that he preferred socialism to *Kapitalismus*. But Funder wonders if some are looking back at the GDR through rose coloured glasses, sensing ‘an ache for a lost time when things were more secure’ (p. 252).

**Questions**

1. What view does Professor Mushroom have of the GDR?

**The Wall**

Funder renews her acquaintance with Berlin, walking through streets lined with cherry trees and chatting to people she encounters, and meets a drunk who doesn’t ‘want to be German anymore’ (p. 253). A friend at the File Authority tells her Mielke has requested to see his own file and contact is made once again with Frau Paul. Frau Paul is still active in an organisation helping those persecuted by the regime, running prison tours and campaigning for victim compensation. She tells Funder about being followed home by someone she believes to be ex-Stasi, referring to people who don’t want voices to be raised about the past. Mielke dies aged ninety-two, the headlines proclaiming, ‘Most hated man now dead’ (p. 255).

Funder visits a new museum at BenauerStrasse that includes a fully reconstructed section of the Wall, including the ‘Death Strip’. She notes this new wall is pristine: ‘...a sanitised Disney version; it is history, airbrushed for effect’. Herr Koch returns, taking Funder on a more realistic trip along the old route of the Wall, still defining himself by the Wall, still a true believer in socialism, unable to let go of the past. Funder describes him as a ‘lone crusader against forgetting’ (p. 258). She finds ironic humour in a vegetable garden in the old ‘no-man’s land’ part of the Wall. Two brothers fought over the land and now a fence splits the garden in the middle. Tourist stalls sell GDR entry visa stamps and Koch gives Funder a piece of the Wall complete with certificate of authenticity. Funder describes Koch, now working as a tourist guide, as giving American tourists ‘his side of history’ (p. 261).

**Questions**

1. What does the Guard tower represent for Herr Koch?
2. What is ironic about the street inlaid sign?
**Puzzlers**

Funder visits the village of Zirndorf, near Nuremberg, where the File Authority now runs the building where the puzzle women work to reassemble 15,000 sacks of shredded and hand-ripped files. The term ‘puzzle women’ isn’t quite correct as thirteen men work as ‘puzzlers’ alongside eighteen women. Funder wants them to find out what happened to Charlie Weber. She wonders why the files can’t be reassembled using computer programs but the director informs her that only originals are acceptable for ‘purposes of evidence’. The whole process is extremely expensive and staff must be westerners with no past connections to the Stasi. Funder describes the place as ‘...something between a hobby farm for jigsaw enthusiasts and a sheltered workshop for obsessives’ (p. 265). She learns more about the laborious process and the type of files reassembled. One of the workers tells Funder that the regime manipulated people to such a degree that they were driven to do things that in a ‘normal’ existence they would never consider. We learn there were aspects of life in the East that were better; childcare was cheap, rents were lower and Funder ponders if those in the West really do need so many varieties of ketchup from which to choose. Her revelation of statistics from the fact sheet on Project Group Construction (the puzzlers) is astonishing to the reader. It would take 40 workers 375 years to reconstruct all of the bags of shredded and torn files: ‘I am speechless’ writes Funder (p. 269). She realises that the whole project is really just a symbolic act, wondering about Miriam and her hopes that the pieces of her life will be put back together in the next 375 years.

**Questions**

1. Why is Funder surprised by what she finds at the Stasi File Authority?
2. What is Herr Raillard saying by the statistics he gives Funder?

**Miriam and Charlie**

The last words of the previous chapter segue neatly into the next. Funder arrives in Leipzig, noticing a newly built museum. She is the only visitor as she wanders around seeing a TV monitor showing old von Schnitzler broadcasts and discovering old Renft memorabilia in a glass cabinet. She feels annoyed that ‘this past can look so tawdry and so safe, as if destined from the outset to end up behind glass...’ (p. 269). Next, Funder revisits the Stasi museum, with its smell jars, the place where her quest began. Miriam finally answers her
phone, inviting Funder over to her new apartment that is ‘white, light and comfortable’ (p. 272). Miriam now works at a public radio station, shocking Funder with the news that some of her colleagues are former Stasi informers. There has been an increase in ‘Ostalgie’ but Miriam declines to be involved in these programs, worried that ‘[t]hings like this feed into a crazy nostalgia for the GDR...’ (p. 275). Funder changes the direction of the conversation to Charlie, wanting to know what he was like. Miriam shows her photos, including some of an ‘exquisite, extraordinarily beautiful’ Miriam, and another taken just after her release from prison. She describes Charlie as sensitive and reserved, his independence matching hers and making their marriage ideal. Miriam, clearly pleased to see and talk to Funder again, shows her a poem written by Charlie and seems to simply pick up where the conversation left off several years previously. She reveals how the Stasi harassed her and Charlie after they applied to leave the East, before he was imprisoned, never to return. Miriam’s attempts to find out more about Charlie’s death and burial in the intervening years have been fruitless. The DA’s office doesn’t want to pursue the case; the judge who signed Charlie’s arrest warrant is still on the bench. She has lost faith in the investigation after the DA dismissed a witness she had found and a plea to the Minister of Justice had garnered no response. But she still holds out hope for the puzzlers. As Funder says, Miriam is playing a waiting game that keeps her life suspended: ‘And underneath the need to know is the need for justice’ (p. 280). Her fragility is highlighted when Funder observes Miriam asleep in the living room, a blindfold across her eyes and ‘so slender and crumpled’ (p. 280). Funder farewells Miriam at the station and reads a copy of Charlie’s touching poem on the train. She thinks of Charlie ‘now of this land’ and Miriam as ‘a maiden blowing smoke in her tower’ (p. 281). The chapter, and the text, closes with Funder’s focus on colour, brightness, grass, and life moving on. For the first time, she notices a playground near her apartment, rather than homeless old men.

Questions

1. Why was the government so insistent on constructing he ‘Contemporary History Forum’?
2. Does Funder change from the beginning of the book to the end."
CHARACTERS

Anna Funder

The author is a crucial character in her own book. Funder, as the writer of this non-fiction text, differs from some non-fiction writers in that she personally leads the reader on their journey of exploration into Stasiland and also chooses to reveal information about herself. Little snippets of her life are embedded in the writing; learning German at school and why she loves the language, home in Sydney, her previous visits to Germany, the Australian TV show Prisoner, her mother’s death from cancer and her employment history. Her role as narrator also allows the reader to know how she feels—to see events and people from her point of view. Funder sheds tears as she talks to Miriam, Julia and Frau Paul. She feels uncomfortable with Herr Bock, feels some sympathy for Herr Bohnsack, and does not like von Schnitzler. Funder also reacts to the physical environments of the places she visits. Her obvious curiosity, detailed descriptions, and point of view towards the people she meets, engage the reader. We see what she sees, smell what she smells and learn what she learns. Funder’s control of her reader is why we should never forget that she is as much a part of Stasiland as other characters.

Miriam Weber

Miriam’s story drives Stasiland as Funder’s thoughts return to her so often. She deliberately lives in an apartment that makes her feel secure: ‘From here you could see anyone coming’ (p. 14). She lives on the top floor with views over Leipzig. Funder captures the juxtaposition between her slight, fragile body and big voice: ‘… it fills the room, and it wraps us up’ (p. 14). Miriam became an enemy of the state at age sixteen, the ramifications of her leaflet production episode with Ursula, forcing the daring escape attempt over the Wall. Miriam’s story of her drastic attempt to leave the GDR is full of tension and angst as she comes so close to succeeding. Yet the older Miriam, her hands still bearing the barbed wire scars, manages to lighten the tale in the way she talks about the guard dog, failing in its duty to catch her. Miriam’s experiences in prison of undergoing sleep deprivation torture are harrowing. One cannot help but admire her desperate creativity in concocting a story purely to get some sleep. She is clearly proud of her victory over Fleischer, although her subsequent eighteen-month prison sentence forever changes the way she sees the world: ‘When I got out of prison, I was basically no longer human’ (p. 31). Funder captures the pain in Miriam’s voice as she recalls the dehumanising and claustrophobic prison experience that left her psychologically wounded for life. Charlie Weber gave new meaning to Miriam’s life even though the Stasi regularly harassed both. His death in Stasi custody shattered Miriam, her grief and anger driving her desire to find out the truth behind both his death and farcical funeral. Miriam is an excellent storyteller. Her account of Charlie’s funeral takes on elements of black humour as she caricatures the Stasi efforts to control the event. However, her grief is still palpable. Funder highlights how she clings to the hope that the puzzle women will find evidence to explain Charlie’s death. Other aspects of Miriam’s personality come through in Stasiland. She doesn’t return phone calls or respond to Funder’s letters, seemingly disappearing for a period of time, although always on Funder’s mind. It is not until the last chapters that Miriam re-establishes contact and we learn she has started to let go of her urgency to discover the truth behind Charlie’s death. Frustrated
by her dealings with the German authorities, all she can cling to now is the remote chance that the puzzlers will find something. Funder’s final description of Miriam provides a contrast to the fragile woman she first met: Miriam walks ‘straight backed into the sunlight’, Funder hoping that ‘for now [her] beasts are all in their cages’ (p. 282).

**Charlie Weber**

Charlie is first mentioned on page 32 when Miriam recalls her fear that he was going to strike her when he was simply removing his guitar strap. Charlie was a sports teacher, working part-time as a lifeguard when he met Miriam. His encounters with the Stasi first started when he and a friend swam near a Swedish boat during a Baltic Sea holiday. This incident was enough for them to bring him in on suspicion of wanting to leave the country. Charlie, not wanting to work for the state as a teacher anymore, leaves to pursue freelance writing, a tough way to make any money in the GDR. Most of his writing is underground and he has a small book published in West Germany. Like Miriam, he avoids submitting himself to the structures and authorities of the regime. After Miriam’s sister and her husband try to flee the GDR, Charlie is placed under formal suspicion of ‘Attempting to Flee the Republic’, but when he and Miriam apply to legally leave themselves, scrutiny becomes even tighter. He was arrested on August 26, 1980 and apparently died in his remand cell on October 14. Miriam, who cannot believe that he would take his own life, disputes the official verdict of suicide. Because the reader never meets Charlie, all our knowledge of him is hearsay through Miriam, and insufficient to build a proper profile of his character and personality. Charlie becomes a symbolic presence in *Stasiland*; his unnecessary death representative of the brutal inhumanity of the regime and its instrument of control, the Stasi. He is also symbolic of Miriam’s personal quest for answers and peace of mind, a quest that underpins Funder’s book.

**Julia**

The irony of Julia’s character is that she believed in the GDR and had no wish to leave. Funder also notes that Julia, despite all she has been through, seems at times nostalgic rather than bitter about the regime. The reader may find this rather difficult to comprehend but needs to remember Funder’s observations about the East German psyche and its relationship with the past. Julia is Funder’s landlord who rather oddly lets herself into the flat at odd times to remove her possessions. These strange intrusions only start making sense when Julia’s story is revealed. The revelation of her past starts on page 92 after she searches out a box of old love letters. Like Miriam, Julia’s first encounters with the Stasi come at a young age when she acquires an Italian boyfriend. Unlike Miriam, who tells her story quite directly, Julia is more cryptic, hence the title of the chapter, ‘Julia has no story’. Indeed, she has a shocking story to reveal to Funder. Her relationship with the deliberately unnamed boyfriend from the West leads to intense Stasi surveillance. Julia notices how black cars follow her or park outside her home, her phone calls are tapped and bags constantly searched. One of the saddest aspects of Julia’s story is the deliberate ruination by the Stasi of her dreams to become an interpreter. Languages fascinated her as she wrote letters to the outside world in different languages, always hoping that her future career path would embrace her talents. However, the regime dictated her education, sending her to a distant boarding school and ensuring she did not gain a university place despite excellent academic results. Funder emphasises the stultifying effect of constant
surveillance upon Julia. She withdraws from her boyfriend into her home and ultimately from hope, unemployable, unable to make a place in the world. We feel great compassion for Julia after her meeting with Major N. who tries to persuade her to become an informer: ‘He wanted to own me. I knew if I stayed with him I would not be able to determine my own life’ (p. 112). Julia bravely stands up to Major N. encouraged by family support; however, the whole experience takes its toll, as she essentially breaks down, unable to cope with the structures and controls being imposed on her. Funder gently encourages Julia to reveal the subsequent events that further shatter her already fragile world. A victim of rape soon after the fall of the Wall, Julia becomes even more detached from the world, finding it difficult to leave her home. Her depression and anxiety escalate and she is finally seeking help from a psychotherapist at the time Funder comes to know her. As Funder observes: ‘By no fault of her own, Julia Behrend had fallen into the gap between the GDR’s fiction and its reality’ (p. 105).

Frau Paul

Frau Paul’s story encompasses three chapters of *Stasiland*, highlighting the significance of her experiences under the regime. In her early sixties, living in a spick and span home, when Funder arrives to interview her, Frau Paul is well prepared with notes about her story. Her story differs from those of Julia and Miriam in several ways. Frau Paul is older when she comes under Stasi scrutiny, is a mother separated from her sick child, and also involved in organised attempts to escape the GDR. Another difference is the possible unreliability of some of her story. Whereas Funder positions the reader to trust Miriam and Julia’s stories, there is a little question mark over aspects of Frau Paul’s participation in schemes to assist escapes to the West. It seems she is ashamed to tell all, when ironically Funder and the reader see no shame whatsoever as Michael Hinze later reveals that she was very committed to helping people get out of the GDR. Frau Paul just can’t bear to be thought of as a criminal. The shockingly unsupportive treatment the family receive from the state when baby Torsten is so ill seems unbelievably cruel. Imagine having to apply for government permission to visit your sick child on the other side of the Wall. Imagine that permission being denied or only one parent being allowed to attend the perilously ill child’s christening in case both decided to remain in the West. Frau Paul takes great pains to make it clear to Funder that she wasn’t a classic resistance fighter, a criminal, or politically motivated when she and her husband decide to illegally leave the GDR. Her account of their aborted effort to flee with several students is tense, as the highly organised plan comes so close to succeeding. Funder links Frau Paul’s story to the central idea of memory in *Stasiland*: ‘Memory, like so much else, is unreliable. Not only for what it hides and what it alters, but also for what it reveals’. Much is revealed about Frau Paul after her interrogation at Stasi headquarters. The Stasi had been watching her home closely, monitoring the movements of the students she and her husband welcomed into their home. Funder uses the chapter, ‘The Deal’, to show the dreadful choice given to Frau Paul by the Stasi interrogators—act as Stasi bait and help trap Michael Hinze, enabling her to see Torsten, or refuse their offer: ‘I had to decide against my son, but I couldn’t let myself be used in this way’ (p. 220).

Frau Paul plays an important role in Funder’s collection of stories from the past but her character is also crucial to the present. She now works as a guide at Hohenschönhausen prison, where she was held for five months initially before she and her husband were sentenced to four years hard labour, and now works with others to preserve it. Frau Paul
importantly provides the means by which Funder tours the prison, showing her the cell where she was made to sit on a small stool for twenty-two hours and the truck used to transport prisoners. Funder writes that her ‘soul was buckled out of shape, forever’ in that prison and also reminds the reader not one of the torturers there has been brought to justice (p. 227). A main element of Frau Paul’s story is the way she views herself, not as a hero, but as a criminal: ‘This seems to me the sorriest thing; that the picture she has of herself is one that the Stasi made for her’. Funder’s sympathetic writing and her description of her own tears when Frau Paul breaks down, wondering if she did the right thing, are powerful.

Von Schnitzler

The language and tone used by Funder in the ‘Von Schni-’ chapter provides quite a contrast to her discussions with Miriam and Julia. We already have a clear sense of this ‘most hated face of the regime’ and his role as a propaganda tool for the regime from Funder’s previous mentions of his name, as well as her unnerving visit to the TV archives to view some episodes of ‘The Black Channel’. Von Schnitzler served in Hitler’s army, was captured by the British and sent to England as a POW where he made broadcasts for the BBC. After his return to Germany in 1945, he worked in broadcasting in the British Occupied Zone but was sacked for his Communist views, leaving to the Soviet zone in 1947. Von Schnitzler is a domineering, proud man who becomes angry when Funder wants to skip some of his life story and talk about his propaganda role. He is painted as a bully, whose shouting is followed by bouts of calm reason. When questioned about those shot while escaping over the Wall, he rants: ‘It was absolutely necessary! It was an historical necessity. It was the most useful construction in all of Germany’s history!’ (p. 134). Von Schnitzler is an absolute true believer in the GDR and assures Funder that he is still ‘beloved’ today for his work against imperialism. It is a terse encounter; Funder’s negative feelings about both his political views and personality are clear to the reader. This elderly man who switches from one view to another with frightening ease attempts to convince Funder that Mielke was ‘the most humane human being’ (p. 137). His nickname of ‘Filthy Ed’ seems well deserved.

Herr Christian

This ex-Stasi man has a sense of fun about his past. While taking Funder on a tour to see some of the places where he worked, in his big, black BMW, Herr Christian tells of his acute sense of duty to obey the law. He experienced his own run-ins with his Stasi employees, being locked up for three days and demoted after having an affair (he had failed to report it). A more engaging character than some of the other ex-Stasi men, Herr Christian animatedly talks about his love of surveillance work, including wearing disguises: ‘Yes, being a blind man is the best way to observe people’, he tells Funder (p. 154). He continues his enjoyment of surveillance by now working as a private detective.

Hagen Koch

Funder dubs Herr Koch the ‘Socialist Man’ because of his immersion in the ideology of the GDR from a young age. She uses Koch to further explore what life is like post-Wall for
those who worked for the Stasi, although Koch, in quite a different tone from von Schnitzler, also wants to tell the story of his childhood, perhaps to justify his later career and ‘rewrite’ a little of his own family history. His father fought in the German army, arriving back in Dessau in 1945, a city which was to become part of the Soviet zone in 1949. He was retrained as a teacher but struck trouble when he ran for the mayoral position. As Herr Koch tells the story, his father was made to choose ‘wife and life’ or a labour camp unless he joined the Socialist Unity Party. He then had to teach the doctrine of Communism to his students, including his own son, Hagen. Hagen is also, due to party pressure on his father, compelled to join the Free German Youth movement where he is inculcated with political ideology and the need to obey one’s government. Funder describes him as a ‘Musterknabe, a poster boy for the new regime’ (p. 165).

Herr Koch plays a symbolic role in Stasiland. As Honecker’s cartographer, he draws the white chalk line across the street marking the place where the Berlin Wall will be constructed. He also tells Funder that he is the only person alive who can represent the entire Wall from the Eastern side; he knows exactly where it was and the location of any remains. Herr Koch moves to the part of his story that is more interesting to Funder—his run-ins with the Stasi. After he resigns from his job, he suddenly finds himself charged with making pornographic material and put in prison, unable to contact his wife and young son. His wife, under pressure from the Stasi and fearing the removal of her child, signs divorce papers. Herr Koch describes his reaction: ‘At that moment my world broke apart’. He is forced to retract his resignation and renew his pledge of lifelong service to the Party, now free of the wife of whom the Stasi disapprove. A neat twist is provided when we learn the couple remarry eighteen months later once his wife realises how the Stasi deceived her. In later years, after being denied permission to attend his father’s funeral, Herr Koch has had enough and leaves the Stasi. One little act on his part becomes a focal point for Funder. He takes a plate as ‘my little private revenge’ (p. 178). The story of the plate is told in its own chapter, ‘The Plate’, a rather comic retelling of the Stasi’s determined efforts to recover an item of negligible financial value. Even after the fall of the Wall, Herr Koch still felt the reverberations of this action, finding himself labelled a thief and liar. But to him, it was worth the personal slights: ‘All the courage I had is in that plate’ (p. 182). Herr Koch also provides Funder with diagrams and photos that allow her to retrace Miriam’s steps at the Bornholmer Bridge.

Herr Winz

Herr Winz is the first ex-Stasi man whom Funder meets. She is incredulous that he still wants to play spy games seven years after the fall of the Wall, telling Funder he will hold a rolled up magazine as a signal when they meet at a hotel. He also wants to see Funder’s ID card, shocked when told that Australians don’t need to carry them. Ironically, he refuses to show his ID. Herr Winz is characterised as a little eccentric when he presents Funder with a copy of The Communist Manifesto signed by himself. He claims to have worked in counter espionage from 1961-90 and is now a member of the Insiderkommittee for ex-Stasi men. Funder senses he misses his past life as he accuses the West of propaganda, obviously implying that Funder won’t provide an objective view of GDR history: ‘I am here to tell you about the excellent work—the masterful work—of the Stasi in counter espionage. That is where I spent my life’ (p. 85). These words give Funder all the information she needs about Herr Winz. (Note: Funder’s German publisher was forced to remove some of the pages about Herr Winz when Stasiland was reprinted in that country because of legal action by
Klaus Renft

Klaus is different from the other people interviewed by Funder. He is actually a personal friend, and drinking companion. His band, The Klaus Renft Combo, was the most popular band in the GDR, and Klaus enjoyed his reputation as the ‘bad boy’ or ‘Mik Jegger’ of the Eastern Bloc. The band ran into serious problems with the regime when they started singing about the ‘holy things’ of the GDR—the army and the Wall. They wanted to ‘scratch the GDR at its marrow’ with songs such as ‘The Chains Are Getting Tighter’ (p. 186). As they toured, Klaus observed more and more that the society was built on lies: ‘…there were so many lies that singing the truth guaranteed them both hero and criminal status’ (p. 187). Eventually, he and the band were summoned to the Ministry for Culture and told that they no longer existed. Klaus, who had secretly recorded the interview with the Ministry, put out the word that if anything happened to the band members, the tape would be played on western radio. Funder, through Klaus’s words, paints an Orwellian picture of the overnight disappearance of all evidence of the Klaus Renft Combo. What Funder finds surprising is that Klaus is not angry or bitter at what took place, even after finding out that their manager had been Stasi all along and that another band with a new name appeared and recorded the Renft songs ‘note for note’. Funder observes that ‘[h]e seems incapable of regret, and anger evaporates off him like sweat’ (p. 191). Klaus claims he coped because he had no interest in material possessions and ‘didn’t let them get to me’. Funder interprets his lack of interest in punishing the Stasi as ‘his victory’—‘This is what stops him being bound to the past and carrying it around like a wound’ (p. 193). In this sense, Klaus provides a contrast to Miriam and Julia, whose wounds are still raw.

Herr Bock

Herr Bock is a passionate expert in the science of recruiting informers. He knows the art of the handler. Herr Bock lives in yet another brown and beige house; even dressing in the drab colours that Funder has come to see as representing the regime. He seems still steeped in Stasi life, asking that his name not be used, as he waylays Funder with statistics about the Stasi infiltration of the church and demonstrations. His tone is proud as he lectures her about the main working methods of surveillance and the qualities needed in an informer. Herr Bock justifies informing as vital for the defence of the regime although when asked ‘So why did they do it?’ by Funder, his answers appear more honest to the reader. He says some were convinced of the cause but others felt like ‘somebody’, gaining satisfaction from having one up on another person. She is interested in his observation that it never occurred to the Stasi ‘that our country could somehow cease to be. Just like that’ (p. 202). Herr Bock makes Funder feel uncomfortable and wary as their meeting concludes: ‘This man with his brown cocoon and his conspiratorial room is unlikely to touch me, but I resent his enjoyment in having me at his mercy’ (p. 203).

Herr Bohnsack

Herr Bohnsack is the last ex-Stasi man met by Funder and is different from the others in that he outed himself after the Wall fell. His expertise was disinformation; the leaking of
rumours, manufactured and spliced conversations that never took place and, particularly, working against West Germany. He relates anecdotes about Mielke and the last days of the regime in a somewhat comic tone, describing how his division were required to play ‘war games’ at the office, even being issued machine guns and protective clothing. As they down a beer in a café, Herr Bohnsack tells Funder about his efforts to burn incriminating files in his family’s old baker’s oven, watched by a neighbour who knew exactly what he was up to. His storytelling tone becomes more downbeat as Herr Bohnsack describes how he suffered after the Wall fell. Fearing exposure by a magazine who had gained access to old Stasi data, he decided to ‘out’ himself first by speaking with Der Spiegel, a western newspaper. His old Stasi colleagues felt he’d broken their code of honour, becoming a traitor to them because he went to the media. In answer to Funder’s question about whether he has any friends, he replies: ‘Well, I have none … I’ve fallen between two stools, you might say’ (p. 243). Herr Bohnsack is a sad figure that does genuinely seem to have lost his place in the new Germany.

Major N.

This is a character never met by Funder. He gains a chapter title in the section of Julia’s story where she painfully recalls her encounter with this man who will forever change her outlook on life. Major N. is the Minister of State Security that Julia meets in Room 118. He methodically works through all the letters she and her Italian boyfriend have written to each other, knowing every little detail about the boyfriend, even facts Julia didn’t know herself. He knows every detail of Julia’s family including her sister’s desire to study piano at the conservatory. The only thing he doesn’t seem to appreciate is that Julia and her boyfriend have broken off their relationship. Major N. proposes that Julia become an informer; this is the reason his presence in the book becomes so crucial to her story. He represents the power of the regime to have ownership over people, to control and manipulate their lives. Major N. transgresses the boundaries of privacy for Julia, making her realise she has no private sphere left at all. His desire to turn her into an informer is beaten though when Julia’s parents assist her in calling his bluff by threatening to write to Honecker.
Minor characters

There are other characters in *Stasiland* worth investigation as well. These include:

- The puzzle women (and men).
- Uwe and Scheller with whom Funder works at the TV station.
- Fleischer—the Stasiman who interrogates Miriam and falls for her story.
- Erich Mielke—Minister for State Security (his background is on page 58).
- Erich Honecker—President of the GDR.
- Torsten—Frau Paul’s son whom Funder meets as an adult.
- Frau Paul’s husband.
- Michael Hinze.
ISSUES AND THEMES

Surveillance versus privacy

Those who lived in the GDR were under constant surveillance. The Stasi monitored the population through a variety of means. Funder is interested in how people coped with this intense scrutiny. Some adopted a practical approach and simply lived with it. Julia’s parents did all they could to protect their inner lives. They ‘sheltered their secret inner lives in an attempt to keep something of themselves from the authorities’ (p. 96). Others, like Hagen Koch, even though he worked for the Stasi, found the cost on his personal life immense as his employers tried to destroy his relationship with his wife. Funder refers several times to George Orwell’s novel Nineteen Eighty-Four, to emphasise the extremes to which the regime takes the surveillance. She shows the toll taken on the inner lives of Julia and Miriam; how both ended up withdrawing from the world, unable to trust and live what the reader might consider a ‘normal’ existence. Other examples relevant to this theme are:

- An estimated one informer for every 6.5 people.
- Maintaining files with painstaking care.
- Obsessiveness with detail.
- Cameras, walkie-talkies, vans with antennas, hidden microphones.
- Mail being opened; for example, Julia’s love letters to her Italian boyfriend.
- Monitoring of TV was so close that power workers were able to tell as people turned off sets when ‘The Black Channel’ came on.

What makes people inform?

This is a question the reader soon starts mulling over as Funder reveals such startling statistics. She ends up with a variety of reasons, some more noble than others. She speaks with a psychologist who tells her informers had ‘an impulse to make sure your neighbour was doing the right thing’. This makes Funder wonder if: ‘It comes down to something in the German mentality … a certain drive for order and thoroughness and stuff like that’ (p. 74). Some people certainly became informers because of their belief in Communism and conviction that the task they undertook for the Stasi benefitted the state. Others gained a feeling of superiority, as informers, while many agreed to inform because they believed the consequences of not agreeing would harm their own prospects or those of their family. The Stasi also blackmailed many citizens. Julia refuses to become an informer, as does Frau Paul, at great personal sacrifice. Hagen Koch’s colleague who told his superiors about Koch’s affair possibly did so for his own advancement.
Propaganda

The use of propaganda was a key means of keeping the people of East Germany under control. Local television was tightly controlled by the regime that, aware that some were turning their antennas towards the West, created special programs to persuade people that those in the West were capitalists, imperialists and Nazis. Funder highlights what was known as ‘The Black Channel’ (Der Schwarze Kanal) several times in Stasiland, including her account of interviewing its host, Karl-Eduard von Schnitzler. Von Schnitzler became a symbol of propaganda in the GDR. Julia also experiences the consequences of propaganda first hand when she visits the employment office only to be told she is not unemployed but ‘looking for work’. Other examples include:

- The regime perpetuated the belief that the Wall was built to keep the ‘baddies out’.
- Herr Winz thinks the West created propaganda: ‘The foe has made a propaganda war against us, a slander and smear campaign’ (p. 85).
- Funder watches the first episode of ‘The Black Channel’ showing a ‘hygiene operation’ to cleanse out West German television; the next episode shows two people being shot escaping over the Wall; Funder wonders how von Schnitzler can turn the inhumane into humane.
- School children are forced to watch East German news each night; Julia recalls this experience at her boarding school.
- The regime makes it clear that unemployment doesn’t exist in the GDR.
- Statistics about food production and prices and other economic data are manipulated.

Truth

The concept of truth is explored in several different ways in Stasiland. We have the narrator’s ‘truth’—the way in which Funder perceives both the country and the people she meets. Students should consider how ‘reliable’ a narrator she is for them. Do they believe every word Funder writes? There is also the ‘truth of history’—the different interpretations of history available. Funder considers how history can be rewritten, thus not reflecting the truth of those present at the time. This is one of the reasons why she interviews both victims and perpetrators—to find out what their ‘truths’ are. Propaganda is also a distortion of the truth. East Germans were fed false economic data by the regime that even von Schnitzler admits was a mistake. The truth about food shortages and prices was too obvious to East Germans. The revelation of ‘personal truth’ is also a key element of the text. Miriam and Julia tell Funder their stories, which the reader understands are not tales of fiction, but of the awful things that happened to each. Funder’s interview with Frau Paul raises other questions about the truth. Although there is no doubt about the events regarding Torsten, Funder finds it interesting to later discover that Frau Paul has not revealed the whole truth about herself and her role in assisting people like Michael Hinze. The interviews with the ex-Stasi men also explore truth from another perspective. The reader may feel that some
are more honest than others as they talk to Funder. The author is also interested in why the regime failed to see the truth about the possibility of the Wall coming down. Perhaps they were so focused on recording and regulating the lives of their citizens that they were blinded to the bigger picture. Issues concerning the truth are explored in the following:

- Herr Bohnsack, who outs himself as ex-Stasi after the fall of the Wall, becomes a pariah; telling the truth has made him an outcast.

- Miriam tells the Stasi what they want to hear when she is being interrogated; so desperate to sleep and realising that her ‘truth’ won’t satisfy them, she makes up a fantastical story, which is believed.

- Funder comments on the lack of action to find out certain truths after the Wall falls: Miriam finds it virtually impossible to discover the truth about Charlie’s death, and his death became symbolic of the search for truth in Stasiland.

- The election results in 1989 were believed falsified.

- The destruction of files by the Stasi was an attempt to conceal the truth of their activities.

- Denying the past is a refusal to accept the truth.

**Political ideology**

Readers of *Stasiland* will need to have an understanding of the following terms: communism, socialism, capitalism and imperialism. It can become a little confusing when the words, communism and socialism, seem to be intertwined. Explanation is also needed of the German Democratic Republic. The use of ‘Democratic’ is not quite the same as the way we use the word in Australia or Americans use ‘Republican’. The GDR came about after World War II when the Allies and the Russians divvied up the old Germany. East Germany became a Communist state linked to Russia, while West Germany, although divided into sectors, embraced capitalism and democratically elected government. Both the East and West German governments relegated the fascism of Hitler’s time to history. Funder meets people who are deeply passionate about their political ideology and others who are ambivalent. Von Schnitzler is still deeply resentful of the ‘capitalist, imperialist West’. His life was immersed in politics, firstly as a youth, as a soldier, and then as the face of propaganda for the GDR regime. Others like Hagen Koch were forced through circumstance to work for the regime while some East Germans kept their heads down, toed the party line and just focused on living. And of course, Funder is an Australian, steeped in the traditions of democracy and capitalism. Issues of political ideology are evident in the following scenes:

- The Party pays lip service to institutional democracy as The Party and its instrument, the Stasi, run everything in the GDR.

- Herr Winz brings a copy of *The Communist Manifesto* that he signs and gives to Funder; he claims to be waiting for the second coming of socialism believing
capitalism won’t last.

- Those, like Julia’s mother, who are ambivalent about politics are, however, practical and do what is expected of them by the regime to avoid trouble.

- Julia’s father finds living with a political ideology he does not support more difficult as ‘[h]e would come home hollow’ (p. 96); he became depressed, as he didn’t agree with having to acknowledge fiction as fact.

- Funder mentions examples of the type of studies pursued by the regime; she sees a thesis titled: ‘On the Probable Causes of the Psychological Pathology of the Desire to Commit Border Infractions’ (p. 37).

- The woman who works at the TV archive building believes von Schnitzler is not ‘a turncoat’ like the others; she is one of those nostalgic for life before the Wall came down.

**Guilt**

Funder explores several types of guilt in *Stasiland*. Personal guilt is explored through characters such as Frau Paul and Miriam. Frau Paul has wrestled greatly with her feelings of guilt about Torsten, especially her decision to leave him in the West rather than be used as bait by the Stasi. The absence of guilt is noticeable in several of the ex-Stasi men interviewed by Funder which then raises the question: judged guilty by whom? The perspective on personal guilt of a man like von Schnitzler is very different to that of someone who suffered brutally at the hands of the regime. Funder feels a form of guilt for the dreadful memories she encourages Miriam, Julia and Frau Paul to recall. She feels as if she is hounding Miriam by further invading her private world. The question of national or community guilt is also raised. Is there a case to be answered by those who stood by and watched the regime destroy the lives of many of its citizens? This takes us to the tricky question of guilt to do with the Nazi era of Hitler’s Germany. Funder’s observation is that neither Germany likes to dwell on the atrocities of the Nazi era. Aspects of guilt are evident in the following scenes:

- East Germans are taught to associate Nazism with West Germany.

- Funder suggests a lack of repentance by former Stasi men.

- Miriam interprets Stasi preoccupation with the coffin as an admission of guilt.

- Michael Hinze feels no guilt for what happened to Frau Paul.

**Victims**

Funder stretches the reader’s interpretation of who the victims of the GDR regime may be. Clearly characters such as Miriam, Charlie, Julia and Frau Paul are victims; one lost his life, the others left with life-long scars from their treatment at the hands of the Stasi. Klaus is
also a victim of the regime’s oppression; his band was simply eliminated overnight. Interestingly, he doesn’t seem as upset at what happened to him as Funder thinks he should be. He is more accepting of events than others. Hagen Koch, even as a Stasi employee, suffers greatly in his personal and professional life. Herr Bohnsack finds himself between a rock and a hard place; ostracised by his former Stasi colleagues for ‘outing’ himself, but still not accepted by others. However, he is a very different type of victim to Miriam and Julia, not having experienced interrogation, imprisonment, and intense personal surveillance. Experiences of victims can be examined in the following scenes:

- Frau Paul loses the experience of mothering her child as a baby and toddler.
- Miriam has never fully recovered from being in prison because ‘[p]rison left me with some strange little tics’ (p. 32), and she removes doors and likes to be able to get a clear view outside.
- Julia gradually ‘withdrew from things’; her dreams of becoming an interpreter or translator are never fulfilled (p. 105).
- Klaus loses a number of years from his music career and suffers the indignity of his music being stripped from the shops overnight.
- Herr Koch experiences the Stasi meddling in his marriage to such an extent that his wife leaves him.
- Funder observes: ‘Large and small mysteries were accounted for when the files were opened. Not least, perhaps, the tics of the ordinary man in the street’. Her comment reflects the suffering of the many others victims of the regime.
- Julia’s father suffers depression after his retirement in 1989 and she blames it on him spending so much time on having to comply.

Justice

After World War II, the Nuremberg trials were responsible for seeing justice dealt to those responsible for the Holocaust. We still hear of cases now where perpetrators of crimes in various countries are brought to trial for inhumane offences committed in the past. Anna Funder implies that the reunited Germany has failed to seek justice for those who were victims of the GDR regime and its instrument of control, the Stasi. She highlights the minimal sentence handed to Erich Mielke and the irony that so many of those involved in the administration of the GDR were able to find good jobs after reunification. This is juxtaposed with the story of Miriam’s search for justice in the case of Charlie’s death. Despite her efforts, Miriam finally realises that she is getting nowhere; those who should theoretically be helping her seem obstructive or disinterested. Justice is also explored in the following incidents:

- The irony that ex-Stasi found it easier to get jobs as they were seen as reliable.
- Miriam and Ursula decide to make their own justice; they didn’t think it was fair that
the police roughed people up.

- Funder comments on Miriam: ‘And underneath the need to know is the need for justice’ (p. 280).
- The judge who signed the warrant for Charlie’s arrest is still serving on the bench.
- Funder believes the puzzlers are simply a symbolic act.

**Living with the past—should it be forgotten or remembered?**

Funder is fascinated by the question of how those who lived in the former GDR, whether believers in the regime or not, deal with the past. For victims like Miriam, Julia and Frau Paul, recalling the past is extremely painful. Each has suffered experiences that some would prefer to forget. Klaus tends to be nonchalant and unresentful about what happened to him, preferring to simply take life as it comes, rather than dwell on what could have been. Miriam has suffered immense grief over Charlie’s inexplicable death and her own imprisonment. She has invested considerable emotional energy in her search for answers and lives a life ‘suspended’. Julia is seeing a psychotherapist during the time period in which she slowly reveals her past experiences to Funder. She withdrew from the world after her imprisonment and experiences with the Stasi, as well as having to deal with the trauma of being raped soon after the fall of the Wall. Julia’s psychotherapist wants her to confront her past, in order to move on with her life, hence her search for the letters from the Italian boyfriend. *Stasiland* ends with the reader finding out Julia has embraced a new life in California. Funder also meets various people who work hard to keep the memories of the GDR alive. Volunteers who don’t want people to forget the unrelenting control the Stasi exercised over the East German population run some of the museums she visits. They preserve buildings, store archives, display photos, and provide guided tours through places like Hohenschönhausen prison. Some Germans would prefer to forget the past: ‘You know, they just want to stop thinking about the past. They want to pretend it all didn’t happen’ (p. 45). Funder weighs up these views while she narrates *Stasiland*, leaving the reader quite sure that she strongly believes clear memories of the past must be maintained, both to honour those who suffered, and also to ensure that the wrongs inflicted on many East Germans, as well as the brutal and extreme surveillance of a whole population by a government, are never forgotten. Funder is also fascinated by the regime’s inability to foresee the future: ‘…what it must have been like for those to be on the inside of the Firm, and then to have that world and your place in it disappear’ (p. 53). Further scenes to examine include:

- The Ossis regret the passing of socialism. *Ostalgie* is the term given to those who are nostalgic for the former East Germany.
- Herr Winz misses the security of the GDR; he claims it was much safer.
- There are those who want to keep the GDR as history, while others are embarrassed by the past.
- Funder considers how history influences the present and the future.
• She senses from some she meets insecurity about what it means to be German: ‘Sometimes, I wonder what it would be like to be German’, says Funder (p. 11).

• ‘Why are some things easier to remember the more time has passed since they occurred?’ (p. 14).

• ‘To remember or forget—which is healthier? To demolish or fence it off? To dig it up or leave it in the ground?’ (p. 52).

• The debate after the Wall fell about what do with the Stasi files. Some people wanted them completely destroyed while others felt a strong need to access their Stasi files.

• Uwe’s dismissive response to the letters that come to the radio station; Funder feels everyone is claiming innocence.

• The role of museums and memorials is considered in Stasiland.

• Miriam’s painful retelling of her story to Funder (p. 106).

• Culture shock experienced by some people brought up in the GDR after reunification.

Individual conscience and courage

Stasiland highlights the different types of conscience and courage demonstrated by people. Funder recalls Herr Winz, Herr Christian and Herr Koch ‘and the different kinds of conscience there are’ (p. 192). Frau Paul provides a very different example of conscience. She lives with the guilt and sadness of not seeing her son grow up in his early years; however, her conscience would not allow her to be used as bait to lure Michael Hinze to a possible death at the hands of the Stasi. Frau Paul, working as a museum guide and a support worker for those brutalised by the regime, demonstrates both her need to appease her conscience about what happened in her country, as well as dealing with her personal demons. Von Schnitzler is portrayed as a man without conscience. The only concession he is willing to make is that the regime did in fact exaggerate economic data. Miriam, Julia and Frau Paul show great personal courage. All endure imprisonment and other punishment inflicted by the regime; the derailment of educational and employment dreams, the grief at inexplicably losing a loved one, enforced separation from a sick child and constant personal scrutiny. It also takes great courage for Miriam and Julia to live in the present. The reader can also make a judgement about Funder’s courage in pursuing the information needed to write Stasiland. Meeting with strange men in unknown places would be unnerving, but as Funder observes when Frau Paul momentarily locks her in the prison van, she will never be able to fully understand what prisoners have been through. Such issues are also highlighted in the following moments:

• Funder is overwhelmed by Miriam’s courage in her attempt to escape over the Wall.

• Miriam’s courage in confronting the Stasi about Charlie’s death and funeral.
• Obedience and disobedience—do you have to be courageous to be disobedient? Are those who comply without question lacking in courage? What about obeying when it’s not in one’s best interests? Miriam stops obeying the summonses to report to Stasi offices.

• The physical and emotional costs of courage.

• Sixteen-year-old Julia and Ursula making and distributing leaflets: were they courageous or foolhardy?

• Frau Paul refusing to act as bait for the Stasi.

• Funder highlights the difficulties for people in the GDR to speak out. They couldn’t simply write a letter to editor to complain as an Australian could.

Stories

Stasiland is a book of stories, not make-believe stories, even though Funder does sometimes feel she has fallen into another world (hence her Lewis Carroll quote), but stories told by real people. Each story affects the reader in different ways. We [Australian readers] are shocked as the history of East Germany and its Wall are revealed, but Funder’s revelation of Miriam and Charlie’s story, the slow unburdening of what happened to Julia and Frau Paul’s recollection of her experiences are so very personal. The tales of the ex-Stasi men provide a different perspective, as do the little anecdotes woven in by Funder: the public toilet lady, the two men who pretend she’s not there at the TV Archive building, the encounters with the homeless in the park. Funder also provides insights into how she feels, giving the reader a double layer to absorb. The writer’s story is very much intertwined with the people she meets. Funder tells where and how she travels, what her apartment looks like, her liking for a drink, and snippets of her own past. The interviewees also tell their stories in very different manners. Frau Paul has made no notes, von Schnitzler lectures Funder, Julia’s story is slowly told over food and drink, some are told in private homes, cafes or in the car. The story of the puzzle women acts as a ‘bookend’ for Stasiland. We learn about their job very early in the book and also near the end. Other examples of this motif in the text are:

• Miriam makes up a story for the Stasi to survive: ‘It was utterly absurd. But they were so wild about getting an escape organisation that they swallowed it’ (p. 27).

• The Stasi can’t get their story straight about what happened to Charlie.

• The opening up of the Stasi files allowed former East Germans to read a different version of their life stories.

• The man who writes a letter to the radio station arguing ‘history is made of personal stories’ (p. 13).

• Von Schnitzler insists on telling Funder his whole life story.
• Julia tells Funder: ‘For anyone to understand a regime like the GDR, the stories of ordinary people must be told. Not just the activists or the famous writers’ (p. 144).

• A story needs a teller and a listener.

Other themes to explore

Love

• Miriam and Charlie.

• Frau Paul and Torsten.

• Hagen Koch’s marriage and remarriage.

• Love of one’s country.

Oppression and control

• Control of education and employment prospects experienced by Julia.

• Restrictions on travel to the West. The denial of visits to Torsten by his mother.

• The shortages of certain goods and minimal food choices available to people.

• The strategies used by the Stasi to control the population.

• The Stasi emphasis on neatness. Funder describes their offices as ‘frighteningly neat’ (p. 6).

• The specificity of packing lists given to people about to be arrested.

• ‘But eventually … they break you. Just like fiction’ (p. 17).

• Banning of books like Orwell’s Animal Farm and western television.

• Miriam realises Stasi have control over her—‘They were playing with me like a mouse’ (p. 43).

• Miriam and Charlie avoid submitting themselves ‘to the sorts of structures and authority that we couldn’t trust here’ (p. 35).

• Consider what finally made people fight against this oppression in 1989.

• The structured expectations for Stasi workers are highlighted—standards of behaviour, surveillance tactics, signals, etc.

• The overnight elimination of ‘The Klaus Renft Combo’.
• Rigid rules of the swimming pool which Funder visits.

The physical environment

• Funder observes the interiors of buildings as well as the outside environment.
• An emphasis on claustrophobic places suggests the physical oppression of people as well as psychological oppression.
• The greyness and harshness of buildings.
• The dirtiness of places such as the railway station and park.
• Funder highlights the weather conditions.
• Leipzig is portrayed as a city of shortcuts and narrow streets.
• Funder spends a lot of time in museums and archives.
LANGUAGE AND STYLE

Anna Funder uses quite specific aspects of language and style in *Stasiland*. As this is a work of non-fiction, she wants to convey real people, places and events to the reader. Funder also possesses a personal mission: to understand how former East Germans lived behind the Wall and their experiences once the Wall fell. She is fascinated by people who suffered at the hands of the regime as well as those who worked for it, and their responses when the world as they knew it changed overnight. Funder wants the reader to visualise the physical world of the GDR and achieves this through detailed description of the cities of Berlin, Leipzig and Potsdam, as well as many interior places such as people’s homes, museums, a prison, and even a public toilet and a public swimming pool. She acts as a tour guide for the reader, taking us into various locales where we hear a range of stories. Funder walks us through the Stasi Headquarters and other museums, the TV archive building, a prison, the place where Miriam attempted to cross the Wall, private homes, and the building where the puzzlers assemble the endless shredded Stasi files. She also gives the reader emotional cues. As we are drawn into the sad, poignant stories of Miriam, Julia and Frau Paul, Funder shares her emotions as well. Her change in tone when interviewing men like Herr Winz and von Schnitzler positions the reader to respond to these characters in a very different way. If Funder finds them difficult to warm to, so do we.

Funder as the narrator

Funder uses the first person narrative to strongly assert her own presence. She doesn’t stand by; she involves herself in the text and utilises her imagination: for example, imagining the street ballet of the Stasi operatives. Her emotions and reactions are clearly conveyed. An example is Funder’s words: ‘I went home to Australia, but now I am back in Berlin. I could not get Miriam’s story, the strange second-hand tale of a woman I had never met, out of my mind. I found a part-time job in television, and set about looking for some of the stories from this land gone wrong’ (p. 9). These sentences indicate Funder’s personalised narrative style, provide some clues about her motives and also show that she will be a ‘biased’ narrator by referring to the former GDR as ‘a land gone wrong’.

Funder’s shift into ‘history lecturer’ mode

At times, Funder moves from her first person, closely involved narration, into a more formal style. This shift occurs when she feels it necessary to provide the reader with background history in order to prepare them for the next stage of her storytelling. An example of this mode is found from page 56 to mid-page 60. Funder momentarily breaks off the history lesson to comment on the smell of ‘dust and old air’ in the Stasi Headquarters museum, but then returns to her history commentary until the chapter ends on page 66.

Humour

Amidst the bleakness and greyness of *Stasiland*, Funder provides a number of moments of light relief. She describes the Stasi’s methods of communicating to each other while on
surveillance duty as ‘street ballet of the deaf and dumb’ and ‘choreography for very nasty scouts’ (p. 7). The details of the wigs, moustaches, and other spy paraphernalia, such as handbags with built-in microphones, is also amusing. Funder lightens some of the darker moments with her dry observations. When viewing a packing list the Stasi provided to people who were about to be arrested, she writes, ‘They would be locked up indefinitely and for no reason at all, but they would have clean shoes, teeth and underwear’. Her description of ‘The Lipsi’ dance is also an excellent example of Funder’s use of humour. She caricatures the participants in the dance film as well as the absurdity of the Stasi in thinking they could use this dance as a substitute for ‘immoral’ dance styles from the West.

**Observational skills**

Funder hones her own observational skills in *Stasiland*. She provides great detail about the anonymous people she notices in places such as the park and railway station. Her little snippets about the homeless, drunks and punks remind the reader that Berlin isn’t just a city with a past but also a living, breathing entity of the present. During her interviews with ex-Stasi men and victims of the regime, Funder provides a close-up snapshot of their appearance and surroundings. Hagen Koch is described as: ‘The man who opens the door has a sort of glow about him—a bright face, receding hair and soft brown eyes’ (p. 154). Frau Paul is described thus: ‘[a] large woman in her early sixties opens the door. She has a cap of dark hair and very blue eyes in a soft face’ (p. 205). Funder also closely examines the surroundings: ‘I follow her into the living room, filled with a pair of vinyl c\textsuperscript{o}uches and hanging potted plants… She has made exquisite open sandwiches of mashed egg, and pink meat with stripes of gherkin’ (p. 205).

**Metaphor**

Funder describes Julia: ‘She is a hermit crab, all soft-fleshed with friends but ready to whisk back into its shell …’ (p. 90). Julia’s apartment, and Miriam’s too, act as metaphors for their lives.

**Symbolism**

A great deal of symbolism is used in *Stasiland*. Students will be able to find many examples to associate with particular characters, events, the Stasi, Berlin, the Wall, and Funder herself. Hagen Koch’s plate, stolen as he leaves his job, symbolises his courage. The white chalk line he draws also represents the choices he could have made. Other examples are the linoleum, smell jars, the shredded files, Charlie’s coffin, Funder’s phone, ‘The Black Channel’, photos of Mielke, and neat desks. The ‘Wall in the Head’ (*Mauer im Kopf*) also symbolises the legacy of the Wall that haunts the minds of some. The Berlin Wall itself is both a physical and psychological symbol.

**The use of Miriam’s story as a central strand**

Although Funder tells other stories besides Miriam’s, it is this story that starts and ends the text. In the first chapter, Funder has been unable to get the thought of Miriam, whom she
has not yet met, out of her head. In the final chapter, set fourteen years later, Funder describes her last glimpse of Miriam: ‘Then Miriam waves and walks away, straight backed into the sunlight’ (p. 281). Funder boards her train and reads Charlie Weber’s poem, her final thoughts in the book firmly planted in the story that started her journey through *Stasiland*.

**Other elements of language and style to explore**

- Use of colour, particularly grey and beige. The first and last chapters place more emphasis on green.

- Use of the senses: Funder often refers to the smell of a building. The phrase, ‘the smell of old men’, is repeated several times. Her description of Miriam’s attempt to escape over the Wall also relies heavily on the reader’s sensory perceptions. We feel Miriam’s pain as she cuts herself on the barbed wire, hear her every breath and sense her fear.

- There are many references to ‘old men’. Funder highlights the age of Honecker and Mielke, suggesting that ‘old men’, out of touch with reality, ran the regime.

- Statistics are frequently provided. If all the Stasi files were laid end to end, they would measure 180 kilometres in length. Page 57 provides many statistics.

- Funder names all the places she visits.

- She uses the present tense—‘I am hung over and steer myself like a car’. Note the simile as well.

- Funder uses many questions. Her interrogative style, however, is very different from the methods taught to the Stasi. Her questions are sometimes direct but Funder’s narrative style shows her intellectual and emotional engagement with her interviewees.

- The chapter titles each suggest something about what is central to that chapter.

- The use of irony is very apparent. Consider Funder’s tone when she describes how the Stasi had to sneak into West Germany to buy more shredders. Another good example is her thought when Herr Winz bemoans the fact that you can’t leave the door open anymore as it isn’t safe. ‘You didn’t need to, I think. They could see inside anyway.’

- Use of detail—Funder’s description of the man urinating on page 1 is a paragraph worthy of close examination. The detail helps the reader visualise his actions.
GENRE, STRUCTURE & LANGUAGE

Genre

*Stasiland* is an example of literary journalism, a hybrid kind of writing that blends the techniques of literary fiction with factual content. *Stasiland* is essentially a history, but it follows the conventions of fiction more closely than it does those of traditional historiography (the scholarly writing of history based on the critical assessment of various sources). Funder’s deviation from traditional modes of writing about the past is important to the success of the project she attempts in *Stasiland*, and for effectively communicating some of the text’s central ideas.

Funder articulates the motivation behind *Stasiland* at two key points in the text. At the chaotic swimming pool, Anna states that her research and writing is an attempt to make ‘portraits of people, East Germans, of whom there will be none left in a generation’ (p.147). Then, in her letter to Miriam, she explains that while she set out to tell Miriam’s story she quickly realised that ‘other things’ needed to be explained, and other stories explored and told (p.246). Like the puzzlers, Funder is reconstructing the lives of citizens of the former GDR. To achieve this, she needs narrative space to construct full and believable characters and to let those characters speak in their own voices.

Sharing stories in this way creates particular narrative demands. For the stories to be comprehensible and believable, and for their full impact to be communicable, the characters must be portrayed in both the present and the past. Funder introduces a complex narrative timeframe, again making use of a fiction-writing technique. *Stasiland*’s narrative present is predominantly 1996, when Anna visits Berlin to research Miriam’s story. (The concluding chapters are set in 2000.) Many of the events recounted by Anna or by the people she interviews occurred in the past, in the 1960s, 1970s or 1980s. Funder manages this delicate oscillation through a carefully crafted narrator.

Anna, a character that represents Funder in the text, is *Stasiland*’s narrator. Anna speaks in a first-person active voice to detail events that occur in the text’s narrative present. Her conversations with Miriam, her travels on Berlin’s trains and her drinking bouts with Klaus, for example, are all conveyed in an active voice; that is, she favours sentences in which the subject performs the action of the sentence, as in ‘I want to ask but I sit tight’ (p.33). However, Funder uses a third-person omniscient voice to detail facts and fig-
ures about the GDR in, for example, the paragraphs devoted to describing the parcelling up of territory by the Allies at the end of World War II (p.160) or the final days of the GDR in November 1989 (pp.67–71). At other times, Anna seems to disappear altogether as the author allows characters such as Julia, Miriam and Frau Paul to tell their own stories. This technique allows Funder to separate the narrative present from the past that informs it, while also conveying the idea that the past is never really over.

Funder’s insertion of a first-person narrator represents another break from conventional historiography. Funder places herself – her own subjectivity, vulnerability and fallibility – in her text by introducing Anna as her representative on the page. Anna is keenly aware of her limited capacity to understand the GDR. She often makes direct judgements about people and situations, declaring that Frau Paul ‘overestimated her own strength’ (p.221), for example, or that the absence of the Wall is problematic. This kind of overt judgement is typically absent in historiography or in conventional journalism, both genres concerned chiefly with objectivity and facts. While facts are important to Funder, the meanings and consequences of those facts matter more. Crafting Stasiland as literary journalism gives Funder the space and opportunity to explore and elucidate consequences.

**Structure**

The structure of Stasiland supports the contention that ‘history is made of personal stories’ (p.13). The text is structured around Funder’s attempts to understand one person’s story – Miriam’s. Anna’s two meetings with Miriam bookend the text: the opening chapter documents Anna’s first introduction to Miriam’s history and her trip to Leipzig to meet her, while the concluding chapter details Anna’s second meeting with Miriam three years later. In between these two chapters, Funder introduces a number of other characters with equally harrowing and extraordinary tales as Anna discovers that, to comprehend and communicate Miriam’s story, she needs to ‘explain other things around it’ (p.246).

Each of Stasiland’s chapters is devoted to telling one person’s story. Some stories, such as those belonging to Julia, Frau Paul and Hagen Koch, are depicted over several chapters. However, each story is self-contained. None cross over with another. This structuring technique has two significant effects. Firstly, it conveys the sheer extent of the damage inflicted by the Stasi. There are simply so many important and distinct stories to tell, despite Uwe’s wondering how Anna managed to find all these people (p.120). Secondly, it confers enormous respect upon the storytellers. Each is given their own
space. This humanising strategy contrasts sharply with the degrading and demeaning tactics employed by the Stasi that are so vividly illustrated in the text.

Funder’s focus on elucidating personal histories results in a text that is structured more around themes and ideas, and less around the facts and chronologies that are important in formal history. For example, while the building of the Wall obviously occurred decades before its demolition, Funder describes the November 1989 fall of the Wall early in *Stasiland*, many chapters before she recounts its construction. Far from being confusing, this structuring technique enhances the reader’s understanding of events and situations because these are explained in context. The description of the fall of the Wall is provided when Anna visits Stasi HQ, the site of the 1989 demonstrations. The description of its construction is given when Anna meets Hagen Koch who, in 1961, ‘painted the line where the Wall would go’ (p.155).

The structure also helps support some of the text’s key themes and ideas. The meandering structure might defy the chronological conventions of formal historiography, but it replicates two human processes that are very important to Funder: conversation and memory. Conversation and memory, like the structure Funder employs in *Stasiland*, are episodic and organic. They are composed of connected ideas and events and do not adhere to a strict linear timeline. Listening to Julia recount her tragic history, Anna observes that ‘memories do not come in the right order’ (p.97). Arguably, the chapters of *Stasiland* are not in the ‘right order’ if the reader is desirous of a careful chronicle of events. But as Funder is concerned with personal stories, with the significance of facts rather than with the bare facts themselves, the winding, anachronistic composition is an effective and compelling structuring technique.

**Language**

Literary journalism, the genre that best describes *Stasiland*, is a kind of creative nonfiction in which the creativity exists in the style of the writing itself, rather than in imagined plots and characters. Funder’s vivid language establishes *Stasiland* as an instance of literary journalism and brings her characters and settings to life. Her language is highly descriptive, frequently figurative and extraordinarily precise.

Funder describes a vanished world, a world that, even when it existed, was so secret and bizarre that those who didn’t live within it could barely have imagined it, let alone have comprehended it. Conveying this world is a challenge Funder responds to by using vivid, graphic language. The reader can
easily imagine, for example, the horror of Hohenschönhausen on reading Funder’s description of the smell of ‘damp and old urine and vomit and earth: the smell of misery’ (p.226), or the fanatical celebration of communist heroes with Funder’s description of the ‘god-like’ busts ‘with flowing hair’ and the ‘long row of clenched plaster fists sticking up for international socialism’ (p.71) on display at Stasi HQ.

Funder’s descriptions often incorporate metaphor and simile. Again, this can help render the foreign comprehensible, as evident in the descriptions of Hohenschönhausen’s torture cells that liken contraptions to ‘an apparatus at a county fair’ (p.226) or ‘some Pythonesque sideshow of history’ (p.227). More frequently – and more powerfully – the alien landscape these figurative devices help Funder communicate is an emotional rather than a physical one. Julia is drawn as ‘a hermit crab, all soft-fleshed with friends but ready to whisk back into its shell at the slightest sign of contact’ (p.90). Frau Paul is a ‘lonely, teary guilt-wracked wreck’ (p.221). Simile and metaphor help Funder to draw vibrant, identifiable and believable characters and simultaneously to communicate the enormity of the pain and loss that those characters have experienced.

Funder’s language is also extremely precise. She records the smallest detail about people and their environments, even of incidental background characters such as the beautiful cross-eyed mother with the pierced nose aboard the train to Potsdam (p.149) and the cigarette-smuggling Vietnamese flower vendor whom Anna encounters before visiting Frau Paul (p.204). In sharing Julia’s story, Funder gives minute detail about the sparse apartment, the food consumed by the friends and the fading light in the room. The same attention to detail is used when recording Anna’s conversations with Frau Paul, Miriam and Klaus, as well as with insiders such as von Schnitzler, with his ‘thermos of hot water’, ‘jar of Nescafé’ and ‘large wineglass of something that looks like red cordial’ (p.129). This level of detail is important to Funder’s project. Precision helps rebuild the lives of these people who were so damaged by the regime. Funder’s language gives their lives a richness and respect that they were denied under the Stasi. In this way, her language choices replicate the assiduousness of the unofficial biographies Stasi officers composed in their kilometres of files, but reinstate the respect and individuality that those documents denied and destroyed.
CLOSE STUDY

Students can use these passages to closely analyse Funder’s writing style, as well as thinking further about characterisation, setting and key themes. Each passage could be read aloud in class before the questions are discussed as a group or completed individually.

Miriam’s attempted escape at Bornholmer Bridge (pp. 21–23)

“Miriam climbed through and over the fences … In the west the neon shone and overhead fireworks destroyed themselves in the air.”

- How does Miriam choose this particular place to attempt her escape?
- Is there any foreshadowing that Miriam’s attempt may fail?
- Why is the piece of paper Miriam uses to draw her escape route so important in the passage?
- What does the laughter punctuating the discussion between Miriam and Funder indicate about each of them?
- Both Funder and Miriam emphasise that this was a sixteen-year-old trying to escape. What does this emphasis add to the passage?
- How does Funder make use of dark and light?
- Why the allusion to Beatrix Potter’s ‘Peter Rabbit’ story?
- How does Funder juxtapose the younger and older Miriam in the passage?
- Note how Miriam tells some of the story while Funder fills in parts. Why does Funder choose this style rather than letting Miriam narrate the episode herself?
- Why does Miriam describe her encounter with the dog in a light-hearted tone?
- No words are used to describe the guards who catch Miriam. Why not?
- How do you feel about Miriam after reading this passage? What does she demonstrate about the human capacity for bravery?
Karl-Eduard von Schnitzler (pp. 133–135)

‘Murdoch,’ I say. ‘Yes, he was Australian but now he’s American ... He is a true believer and for him my questions only serve to demonstrate a sorry lack of faith.’

- What parallels can be drawn from the references to Rupert Murdoch’s switch of allegiance from Australia to America?
- What is the effect of von Schnitzler repeatedly using the term ‘global imperialist’?
- Find several references to how Funder is feeling as she interviews von Schnitzler. Explain your choices.
- At what point in the interview does Funder’s mood change from apprehensive to businesslike?
- Why does Funder raise the shooting of the two easterners who tried to escape over the Wall? What is von Schnitzler’s response?
- How does the word ‘humanity’ hold different meanings for Funder and von Schnitzler?
- Why does Funder make a point of highlighting von Schnitzler’s physical gestures and tone of voice?
- What does the Wall represent to von Schnitzler?
- ‘This is so mad that I can’t think of a question immediately.’ What makes Funder react in this way?
- What differences or similarities can you see between this interview and others conducted with ex-Stasi men?
- ‘He is a true believer.’ What does von Schnitzler truly believe?
- What impressions do you gain of Funder’s attitude towards her interviewee? Do you feel the same way?

Funder’s visit to Hohenschönhausen (pp. 224–227)

“We approached the towering grey steel entry gates ... She had been taken out of time, and out of place.”

- Make a list of all the words associated with colour and smell in the passage.
- How does the use of these words shape your responses to the prison?
• Consider the way in which Funder describes Frau Paul here. How does her description differ from how she saw Frau Paul in her own home?

• How does Funder react to being locked in the transport van?

• Why did the Stasi not allow prisoners to see each other?

• What does this passage suggest about personal courage?

• In what way is the four-legged stool symbolic?

• How did you react to the description of the torture methods employed by the Stasi?

• Why does Funder highlight the fact that not one of the torturers at Hohenschönhausen has been brought to justice? Also, why the use of the word ‘torturer’?

• Why does Funder write nearly all of this passage in a straight narrative style, rather than interweaving dialogue?
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. 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?

2. In an interview with Anna Funder on Radio National (14/5/06), Terry Lane commented that Stasiland makes us ask questions about ‘our veneration for law, our craving for law and order and our willingness to obey.’ Does this answer the question of how the Stasi kept control? What other explanations are there for such a high number of informers?

3. In the same interview, Funder comments, ‘I’m interested in obedience, but I’m interested in it from the point of view of what it takes to be disobedient. ...how it is that some human beings have the courage to do what their conscience tells them.’ What does it take to be disobedient? What were the physical and emotional costs of disobedience?

3. Herr Koch poses the question to Funder during his interview, ‘What would you do?’ Funder replies that she would choose, ‘wife and life, of course.’ (p.164) Stasiland explores a complicated world. What would you have done if asked to choose between conscience and family? Between safety and informing?

5. 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?

6. 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?

7. 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?

8. There’s great beauty in the image of people dancing on the wall but there’s something terrible about it, too. Discuss.

9. “‘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.

10. ‘We are here to inform you today, that you don’t exist anymore.’ (p.189) The committee’s comments to Klaus illustrate the regime at its most ridiculous and most frightening. There are Orwellian parallels to be drawn. There are also parallels to be drawn between the lies told in East Germany and the lies told by Australian and...
American governments.

11. 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?

12. 'Optimists and believers are happier and healthier in their unreal worlds.' (p.96) Discuss the fictions that the Stasi created. Discuss the impact that a shifting truth had on people.

13. ‘A man turns from the wall, smiling and zipping up his fly. He is missing shoelaces and some teeth; his face and his shoes are as lose as each other.’ (p.1) Anna Funder’s language is precise. She records the smallest details about people. Discuss the reasons for this level of detail in her work. What comparisons, if any, can be drawn between her writing style and George Orwell’s in 1984?

14. Discuss how Funder uses metaphor to highlight irony, absurdity, pain and loss. What do we learn of Julia though her late night stripping of Funder’s apartment? How does Funder explore the world of Herr Christian, driving through his ‘neat sad forest’?

15. Julia says, "We easterners have an advantage, perhaps, in that we can remember and compare two kinds of systems. . . . But I don't know if that's an advantage. I mean you see the mistakes of one system—the surveillance—and the mistakes of the other—the inequality—but there's nothing you could have done in the one, and nothing you can do now about the other. . . . And the clearer you see that, the worse you feel." Do you believe this is a valid statement? Or is she wrong?

16. 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?

17. ‘Tomorrow bruises will develop on my skin, like a picture from a negative.’ (p.2) Why is Funder’s frailty so comforting and compelling? 18. The love stories in Stasiland are incredibly sad. But they show that there are other aspects of humanity that are enduring other than brutality.

19. Discuss Funder’s interviews with the Stasi men. Are there similarities in the things that motivate them? Discuss the symbolism of Hagen Koch’s drawing of the line. Does his story show that the line between victim and violator is sometimes blurred?

20. How did men like Mielke and Honecker come to be? Is it too easy to explain them away as sociopaths? Are they more guilty than the individuals who informed for the Stasi? Are there levels of guilt? Or is the level of guilt the same, regardless of what role a person played in the regime?

21. 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?
**KEY QUOTES**

*In Northern Germany I inhabit the grey end of the spectrum: grey buildings, grey earth, grey birds, grey trees (p. 3).*

This quote, from the start of the text, reflects several aspects of Funder’s writing style. She plants herself firmly in the text through the use of the first person, a device that will continue throughout. The repetition of the adjective, ‘grey’ emphasises the bland, colourless surroundings in which Funder finds herself. The colour grey recurs constantly in *Stasiland*, suggesting a metaphorical, as well as a literal usage. This opening section of the text in winter 1996 also contrasts with the green of Berlin in spring 2000.

*Sometimes, I wonder what it would be like to be German (p. 11).*

This quote reminds the reader that the narrator is not German, but Australian. As *Stasiland* is a non-fiction text, the narrator’s perspective is crucial. Students should think about whether Funder is able to be an objective narrator. Is it impossible for her, even though she has spent time living in Germany and is fluent in the language, to forget her own life in a democratic, relatively easy-going country? Funder also wonders what it would be like to be German in context of the letter she has just read from an American praising the ‘ordinary German people’ for their friendliness at the end of WWII. She, without actually saying the words aloud, is thinking of the people whom the ordinary German people did not help.

*You know, they just want to stop thinking about the past. They want to pretend it all didn’t happen (p. 45).*

These words come from Miriam who has just told Funder about her suspicions that Charlie’s body was not actually in the coffin buried at his funeral. She has pursued the authorities to act on her suspicions but they have twice suspended the investigation. Miriam has even travelled to Dresden to ‘bang on their desks’. The key point here is that this is post reunification in Germany, when the reader (influenced by Funder) hopes that all remaining secrets will be revealed and Miriam can find concrete answers about what happened to Charlie. The implication is that the new government and their bureaucracy do not want to deal with the past, as do a proportion of the population. Also, as Funder points out at a later stage in the text, many ex-Stasi and GDR regime supporters still work in government positions. It takes people like Frau Paul, fighting to keep the prison as a museum, to keep the memories of the past alive.

*I am curious about what it must have been like to be on the inside of the Firm, and then to have that world and your place in it disappear (p. 53).*

Funder is intrigued by the men who dedicated their lives to the service of the regime, then suddenly found the country they had helped to create and control vanish within days in late 1989. Their lives were so regimented, so grounded in political ideology and certainty, that their way was the only way for a society to live. Suddenly, the Wall is breached, the party leaders gone, the certainty of their day-to-day lives no longer present. The neat, ordered offices of the Stasi are empty, as many files as possible shredded and people are freely crossing to and from the previously divided Germanys. The range of ex-Stasi men interviewed by Funder highlights differing reactions from those who worked ‘inside the
Firm’. Some are still firmly entrenched in their socialist beliefs, while others have moved on. Herr Bohnsack, the man ‘fallen between two stools’, provides a fascinating contrast to the other men. However, Funder’s interviewees seem unanimous in their surprise at the events that unfolded in 1989; they simply did not foresee what happened and this irony contributes to Funder’s curiosity.

**Does telling your story mean you are free of it? Or that you go, fettered, into your future? (p. 87).**

Funder has just left another message on Miriam’s answering machine. Every time she answers the phone, she hopes it is Miriam, rather than more Stasi men wanting to tell their story. Funder is unable to get Miriam’s story out of her mind, creating scenarios to explain Miriam’s failure to return her call. She appreciates Miriam is a fragile person who has already been hounded enough in her past and the pressure to relive her past to a stranger could be too great. Storytelling permeates *Stasiland* but Miriam’s is the one that most haunts the reader, particularly her desperation to find out the truth about Charlie. At the back of Funder’s mind, as well as the readers’, is the question of whether reliving the past is therapeutic for Miriam, or like the scars on her hands, will the past always be part of her future? This quote also links to page 244 when Funder tries once again to phone Miriam before she heads back to Australia where her mother is dying. It isn’t until three years later that Funder meets up with Miriam again.

‘[I]t’s the total surveillance that damaged me the worst. I know how far people will transgress over your boundaries—until you have no private sphere left at all. And I think that is a terrible knowledge to have’ (p. 113).

Julia says this as she recalls her meeting with Major N. for Funder. Her shock at discovering that he knows every little detail about her life, and her family, is palpable to the reader. His proposal that she become an informer, literally ‘owned’ by the Stasi, horrifies Julia. She feels as though her life has been cut from her, telling Funder that it has taken a long time for her to realise the extent of her psychological damage. The box of letters held by Julia, while she talks to Funder, is symbolic of the meeting with Major N. that forever changes her view of the world.

**He is, once more, a true believer: the Wall is the thing that defined him, and he will not let it go. I think for a moment of Frau Paul, who will also not let it go (p. 256).**

Funder has met Hagen Koch again who takes her on a tour of the route of the Wall. He wants to preserve the remaining elements of the Wall, proudly showing off his old guard tower that he saved from demolition, upset that the words to mark where the Wall went could only be read from the western side. Funder describes him as ‘a lone crusader against forgetting’, as Koch gives her a piece of the Wall, complete with authenticity certificate. He is comparable to Frau Paul who fights to preserve the old prison as a museum. The only difference is the version of history given by each.

**Things have been put behind glass, but they are not yet over (p. 276).**

This quote by the author is one that should be remembered by students in their essay writing. It encapsulates the author’s views and values about remembering the past. Funder has visited a number of museums, detailing the tangible items on view to the public. She
sees ‘things’ such as posters, smell jars, neat rows of desks and telephones, surveillance equipment and photographs. However, she knows there are intangible ‘things’ that cannot be kept in museums. These are the physical and psychological consequences of the brutal methods used by the regime to control its citizens: the grief, loss of privacy, mistrust, betrayal, paranoia, fear and anger. It is not yet all over for the population of the former GDR, whether they were victims or perpetrators. ‘Things’ have not yet been resolved, whether for Miriam, Julia or Frau Paul, some of the ex-Stasi and also the ordinary person in the street who feels nostalgic for past times.
GLOSSARY

Berliner Schnauze (De.) - endearing Berlin bluntness

Communism - political philosophy and social movement that advocates and aims to create a society without classes and in which property is commonly controlled

DDR (De.) - Deutsche Demokratische Republik (English: GDR - German Democratic Republic)

die Wende (De.) - German Reunification, literally 'the turning point'

fata morgana (It.) - a mirage

GDR - German Democratic Republic (German: DDR - Deutsche Demokratische Republik)

memento mori (Lat.) - a reminder of mortality

Mensch! (De.) - an exclamation, similar to 'Oh man!' or 'Oh God!'

Nazi - member of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei)

Neo-Nazi - any person seeking to revive Nazism post-World War II

omerta (It.) - a code of silence practiced by the Mafia; a refusal to give evidence to the police about criminal activities

Ossis (De.) - slang: East Germans

Ostalgie (De.) - nostalgia for the former GDR; a combination of two words: Ost (east) and Nostalgie (nostalgia)

Sisyphean - relating to Sisyphus of Greek mythology, laborious or futile

Stalinist - a believer and practitioner of the communist political system associated with Joseph Stalin

Stasi - the Ministry for State Security (Ministerium für Staatssicherheit)

The Iron Curtain - the ideological and physical boundary dividing Europe from 1945 to 1991

Wessis (De.) - slang: West Germans
TEXT RESPONSE TOPICS

1. Scheller tells Funder: “You won’t find the great story of human courage you are looking for—it would have come out years ago, straight after 1989”. Does Funder find stories of human courage?

2. “You know, they just want to stop thinking about the past. They want to pretend it all didn’t happen.” How does Funder show that thinking about the past is necessary to move on with the future?

3. “On some level, at least, I am aware that I am following a person who has been hounded enough.”
   ‘Funder treads a fine line between keeping a distance as an investigative writer and becoming emotionally involved with those she meets.’
   Do you agree?

4. “Does telling your story mean you are free of it? Or that you go, fettered, into your future.”
   ‘Stasiland shows that telling your story means different things to different people.’
   Discuss.

5. ‘The power of Stasiland comes as much from Funder’s depiction of physical places as from the words of those whom she meets.’
   Is this how you see Stasiland?

6. “Things have been put behind glass, but they are not yet over.” ‘Anna Funder discovers the difficulty of leaving the past behind.’ Discuss.

7. ‘The people of Stasiland hold differing views of justice.’ Discuss.

8. “She’s so slender and crumpled her whole body nearly fits onto it, strings cut, in the spotlight.”
   Is Miriam the most important character in Stasiland?

9. How does Stasiland show that people can be used against one another?

10. ‘Funder works hard to make the reader sympathetic towards those who supported the regime.’
    Was this your reading of Stasiland?

11. How are the lives of the people in Stasiland shaped by the Wall?

12. As well as being the author, what role does Funder herself play in Stasiland?

13. How does Funder use symbolism to tell the story of Stasiland?

14. Funder describes the Stasi as “innovators, story-makers and Faustian bargain-hunters”. How successful is she in this portrayal?
15. “It’s so hard to know what kind of mortgage our acts put on our future.” How does Stasiland show that our actions can haunt us in the future?

16. How does Stasiland show that guilt can take different forms?

17. “Memory, like so much else, is unreliable. Not only for what it hides and what it alters, but also for what it reveals.”
     What role does memory play in Stasiland?

18. ‘Although a sense of loss permeates Stasiland, it is ultimately an uplifting book.’
     Do you agree?

19. ‘Stasiland shows that there are different kinds of conscience.’ Discuss.

20. ‘Some characters in Stasiland believe that the Stasi have been punished enough.’
     Does Funder reach this conclusion?

21. ‘Stasiland is a book about lies.’ To what extent do you agree?

22. In what ways does Stasiland show how quickly history can be remade?

23. Julia tells Funder: “For anyone to understand a regime like the GDR, the stories of ordinary people must be told”.
     How does Funder tell the stories of ordinary people?

24. ‘Stasiland examines how normal people manage with traumatic events in their past.’
     Discuss.

25. ‘Stasiland shows the effect too much structure and surveillance has on the human spirit.’
     Discuss.

26. Why does Funder find that the story of the GDR is a story lying somewhere between fiction and reality?

27. ‘Sometimes ignoring reality is the only way to stay sane.’ How is this idea explored in Stasiland?

28. In what way does Funder’s use of the ‘senses’ enhance Stasiland?