# Stasiland by Anna Funder

## Synopsis

In this now classic work, Funder tells extraordinary stories from the most perfected surveillance state of all time, the former East Germany. She meets Miriam, condemned as an enemy of the state at sixteen, and Frau Paul, for whom the Berlin Wall ‘went through my heart’.

She drinks with the legendary ‘Mik Jegger’ of the East, once declared by the authorities to ‘no longer exist’. And she meets ex-Stasi – men who spied on their families and friends – still loyal to the deposed regime as they await the next revolution.

## 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. “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.
5. ‘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.
6. ‘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.
7. 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’?
8. 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?
9. 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?

*Discussion questions from https://sites.google.com/site/wedbookclub/books-we-ve-read/stasiland-discussion-questions*