Stasiland

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ANNA FUNDER

Anna Funder was born in Australia and spent much of her childhood in Paris. She later studied at Freie University in Berlin, and received an MA from the University of Melbourne. She trained as a human rights lawyer, and worked for the Australian government throughout the 1980s and 90s, after which she turned to writing full-time. Her first book, *Stasiland* (2003) was awarded the prestigious Samuel Johnson Prize, the world's biggest monetary award for nonfiction writing in the English language, and her follow-up, the novel *All That I Am* (2011), was awarded the Miles Franklin Prize, the most prestigious award Australia offers.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The overarching historical event described in *Stasiland* is, of course, the rise of the East German state. In the years following World War Two, the Allied powers occupied the western half of Germany, while Soviet troops occupied the east. By the late 1940s, the Soviet Union had established a satellite Communist state in East Germany. Over the course of the next forty years, East Germany instituted a set of authoritarian policies, running surveillance on its own citizens and jailing dissidents and critics of the government. By the late 1980s, East Germany was in a state of near-collapse. In 1989, demonstrators tore down the Berlin Wall, erected in 1961 by East German troops to prevent East Germans from fleeing into West Berlin. In the early nineties, following the liberalization of the Soviet Union, East Germany collapsed, its leaders fled in disgrace, and Germany was reunified.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Stasiland bears an interesting resemblance to several of the works of W.G. Sebald, especially *The Emigrants* (1992) and *Austerlitz* (2001). In his books—which, like *Stasiland*, are hard to categorize, blending elements of the novel, memoir, and personal essay—Sebald deals with themes of memory, guilt, and trauma, often set against the backdrop of 20th-century German history. Readers who enjoy Funder's writing style and descriptions of being a wandering stranger in another country might enjoy *Travels with Herodotus* (2004), a collection of loosely-linked travel essays by the great Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuściński.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Stasiland: Stories from Behind the Berlin Wall
- **When Written:** 2001-2003
- **Where Written:** Berlin, Melbourne, and London
- **When Published:** Fall 2003
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Nonfiction, Cold War history
- **Setting:** Berlin and Leipzig
- **Climax:** Anna Funder reunites with Miriam Weber
- **Antagonist:** The East German state
- **Point of View:** First person (Funder)

EXTRA CREDIT

A play's the thing. *Stasiland* is currently being developed as a play by London's National Theater.

Stranger in a strange land. Anna Funder moved back to Australia with her husband and children after living in Brooklyn for three years. Her explanation was simple: "My kids are of an age where we had to decide whether they were going to be American or whether they were going to be Australian. We decided that we really want them to be Australian."

PLOT SUMMARY

Anna Funder, the author and narrator, travels to Berlin from Australia in 1996. She's there to work for a German TV station and research the state of the country following the fall of the **Berlin Wall** in 1989, and the ensuing collapse of the Communist East German state. Funder's research centers around the "Stasi," the East German secret police and surveillance force. For decades, the Stasi, headed by Erich Mielke, conducted surveillance on a staggering number of East German citizens, and sponsored a vast network of informants.

Funder speaks with a woman named Miriam Weber, who tried and failed to sneak out of East Germany when she was still a teenager. Like so many East Germans who tried to escape, Miriam was sentenced to jail time. Afterwards, Miriam married a young man named Charlie, who, like her, had been declared an "Enemy of the State" for his subversive acts. Charlie was later jailed, and in jail he supposedly hanged himself. Miriam became suspicious and wondered if he had been murdered. She demanded to see the body, and finally, after months of bureaucracy, she was allowed to do so—and discovered marks on Charlie's body suggesting that he hadn't died of hanging at all. For decades, Miriam has been waging a campaign to learn the truth about her husband's death. However, the Stasi kept secret files on tens of thousands of citizens, and shredded many

of those files in the final days of the East German state. As a result, she's been unable to learn the truth about her husband.

Funder posts an ad in the local paper for former Stasi officials. Right away, people respond to the ad, many of them genuine ex-Stasi. Stasi guards are having a hard time under the new German government—they're widely reviled, and find it nearly impossible to find work. She speaks to Herr Winz, an ex-Stasi agent who monitored thousands of people over the years, and still fervidly believes that Communism is the only just form for society.

Funder also speaks to her sub-letter, a young woman named Julia Behrend who grew up in East Germany. Julia excelled at languages as a young woman, and her future looked very bright. However, she was unable to find work—almost certainly because the Stasi discovered that she was dating someone from Italy, and therefore posed a threat to the insular, closed-off nature of East German society. Stasi agents tried to convince Julia's parents to pressure Julia to break off the relationship. When, eventually, Julia *did* break up with her boyfriend, however, she was still unable to find work. A Stasi agent named Major N. tried to pressure her into informing on her Italian ex-boyfriend, but she refused. Julia scored a major victory by threatening to write a letter to Erich Honecker, the Secretary-General of East Germany—and Major N., no doubt trying to avoid embarrassment, arranged for Julia to get work.

Funder next speaks with Karl-Eduard von Schnitzler, the man who for years narrated "The Black Channel," where he provided derisive commentary on TV programs from West Berlin. Von Schnitzler, now a bitter, elderly man, says that the cruelty of the East German state has been greatly exaggerated, as have the size and power of the Stasi.

Julia admits to Funder that, shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, she was raped in the elevator by a mysterious man. Though the man was eventually brought to justice, he may have been released from jail in the confusion surrounding the early days of the new German state.

Funder's next interview is with Hagen Koch, a former Stasi employee who was involved in building the Berlin Wall, and continues to keep thousands of maps and secret documents about the Wall. His father, Heinz Koch, was a soldier in World War Two who later tried to run for mayor in the early days of the Communist East German government. Koch won the election, but was sent to jail by his Communist opponent. Koch later worked for the Stasi, but eventually resigned after realizing the extent of his father's hatred for the organization. On his way out, he stole a small **plastic plate** commemorating his department's work—and for the last twenty years, the government has been trying and failing to recover the plate.

Funder befriends a former rock star named Klaus Jenztsch who was banned from performing in East Germany in the 1970s. Klaus moved to West Berlin and, after 1989, discovered that he'd become a cult figure in his former country. Funder next speaks to Herr Bock, who taught Stasi agents the art of pressuring an informant. Stasi agents were masters of gauging an informant's reliability and trustworthiness. Afterwards, Funder interviews Frau Paul, a remarkably brave woman who was separated from her sickly child, Torsten, shortly after the building of the Berlin Wall in 1961. Paul spent more than two years trying and failing to sneak into West Berlin. Eventually, Stasi guards caught her and tried to convince her to inform on her allies, promising that she'd be reunited with her child if she did so. Paul refused, and was unable to see her child for many years. Funder also talks to Herr Bohnsack, an agent in Division X, the top-secret Stasi sector tasked with "information warfare."

Funder travels back to Australia to be with her dying mother. She then returns to Berlin in 2000, and finds that the city has become very different. There are shiny new museums commemorating the history of East Germany, and of the Berlin Wall. And yet for many of the people Funder talks to, East Germany isn't history at all—it's still very much a part of people's lives. Funder learns that Frau Paul has become active in organizing the victims of Stasi cruelty, and has endured a lot of harassment as a result. Koch leads tours of the Berlin Wall.

Funder visits the Stasi File Authority office outside Nuremberg, where a team of thirty-one people painstakingly reassemble **shredded documents** from the Stasi files. Funder is shocked to learn that it will take almost four centuries, at the current rate, to reassemble all of the documents.

Funder reunites with Miriam, who's still trying in vain to learn the truth about Charlie's death. She shows Funder old photographs of Charlie and of herself. Funder wonders what, exactly, Miriam is trying to accomplish by learning the truth about Charlie's death—and she wonders if Miriam even has an answer to this question. At the end of the book, Miriam gives Funder a copy of a poem that Charlie wrote shortly before his death, which ends: "In this land / I have been sown / Only my head sticks / Defiant, out of the earth / But one day it too will be mown / Making me, finally / Of this land."

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Anna Funder – Anna Funder is the Australian author and narrator of *Stasiland*. Beginning in 1994 and ending in 2000, she makes three trips to Berlin to work for a German TV station and, more importantly, study the way the city's people are adjusting to the recent collapse of the East German state. Funder explores Berlin and surrounding cities like Leipzig and Nuremberg, which were once a part of the Communist East German state. She interviews dozens of Germans, many of whom were once officers in the Stasi—the East German surveillance force and secret police. Especially in the first half

of the book, Funder is most often a witness to other characters' memories and experiences, rather than a dynamic character in her own right. But as the book proceeds, Funder begins to put herself into the narrative more and more. Her own personal connections with German history and with Berlin form a central part of the story, and by the final chapters, she feels a strange sense of melancholy that the history of the East German state is either being destroyed or exhibited in museums—when, in reality, this history is still very a much a part of her life and the other characters' lives.

Miriam Weber – Of all the people Anna Funder interviews over the course of *Stasiland*, Miriam Weber is perhaps the most important to the book's themes. Miriam grew up in East Germany during the 1960s, the same decade during which the Communist government built the **Berlin Wall**, dividing East and West Berlin for the next twenty-eight years. As a teenager, she tried and nearly succeeded to sneak past the Wall into West Berlin, but she was caught and sentenced to jail time for her "crime." Later, Miriam's husband Charlie was mysteriously arrested, and supposedly hanged himself in his cell. Miriam has spent the last forty years trying to learn the truth about Charlie's death, and whether he was murdered by Stasi guards. Miriam's ongoing ordeal represents the relationship between present-day Germany and its recent past. The back-to-back nightmares of the Holocaust and the Stasi police state cannot be forgotten so easily, and Miriam and millions of other Germans continue to suffer from their memories of these atrocities.

Frau Paul – Frau Paul is another woman to whom Anna Funder speaks during her time in Berlin in the 1990s. Paul witnessed the rise of the East German state following the fall of the Third Reich, and in 1961, the same year that the **Berlin Wall** was built, she gave birth to a child named Torsten. Torsten was rushed to a West Berlin hospital, and Paul was separated from her baby for years. During this time, she tried and failed to sneak under the Wall, and when the Stasi offered to reunite her with her child if she informed on her friends, she refused. Paul therefore stands as a symbol of defiance—she's one of the few people in the book who directly stood up to the Stasi. However, as Funder points out, Paul has lived with the pain of her decision for many decades, and like so many "brave" people, she summons the will to be brave because she doesn't fully consider the pain she's causing herself in doing so.

Julia Behrend – Julia Behrend is the owner of the apartment where Anna Funder stays during her time in Berlin. She's a young woman, the same age as Anna, and she grew up in East Germany at a time when the Stasi were being particularly aggressive in monitoring its citizens. Julia excelled at languages, but she was barred from becoming a translator or an interpreter because of her relationship with an Italian man. Amazingly, she was able to pressure Stasi officers into giving her some work by threatening to write directly to Erich Honecker. Julia's memories of East Germany, and the immediate aftermath of the fall of the East German state, continue to wound her. Shortly after the **Berlin Wall** falls, she was raped by a strange man who, it's quite possible, was released from prison in the confusion of the new political order.

Erich Mielke – Erich Mielke was the Minister for State Security, and one of the most influential figures in making East Germany the rigorous police state that it was. Mielke ran the Stasi surveillance force, and was responsible for ordering the surveillance of tens of thousands of German citizens, to the point where Stasi employees numbered almost 100,000. After the fall of the **Berlin Wall**, Mielke was tried and sentenced to jail time. Nevertheless, the impact of his policies as Minister for State Security continues to be felt in 21st-century Germany. In particular, most of the files containing sensitive information about the citizens Mielke surveilled still exist.

Erich Honecker – The Secretary-General of East Germany for most of its existence, and, with Erich Mielke, the most influential figure in its tyrannical, police state structure. In the final days of East Germany, Honecker tried to prosecute and incarcerate demonstrators, but to no avail—revolutionaries tore down the **Berlin Wall** and prosecuted Honecker himself. Honecker later fled to Chile, where he died of cancer.

Karl-Heinz Weber / "Charlie" – Karl-Heinz Weber, or "Charlie," is Miriam Weber's husband during the 1970s, before his arrest and mysterious death in a Stasi prison cell. He's considered a "subversive" in East Germany because of his involvement in publications that criticize Communism and the German state. Shortly after being arrested, the Stasi tell Miriam that Charlie has hanged himself in his cell. Miriam, however, is suspicious, and spends years trying in vain to learn the truth about Charlie's final moments. Charlie's untimely death could be said to symbolize the atrocities and human rights abuses of the Stasi and the East German state.

Klaus Jentzsch – Klaus Jentzsch is a musician and German celebrity, who for many years was one of the biggest rock stars in East Germany. He performed some of his own music, as well as covers of American and British rock songs by the Beatles, Elvis, and the Rolling Stones. In the 1970s, however, the government suspended his license to play music, and Klaus decided to move to West Berlin. Years later, he returned to East Berlin to find that he'd become a cult icon.

Hagen Koch – A former Stasi officer with whom Anna Funder speaks, Hagen Koch was partly responsible for building and mapping out the **Berlin Wall** in 1961. Later on, however, he became exasperated with the cruelty and bureaucracy of the Stasi, and of the Communist state itself. He resigned from the Stasi and, as an act of rebellion, stole a small **plastic plate** commemorating his division's achievements—a "crime" for which various authorities have been trying and, comically, failing to prosecute him for decades.

Karl-Eduard von Schnitzler – The chief propagandist for East Germany, Karl-Eduard von Schnitzler's duties involved providing live commentary for the TV programs of West Germany, on a station informally known as "the Black Channel." For decades, he was secretly despised throughout East Germany, in part because he ruined some of the only good TV entertainment that East Germans could access. Near the end of his life, he speaks to Anna Funder about the current state of Germany, and condemns capitalism for destroying his beloved country.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Frau Hollitzer – The curator of Berlin's Stasi Museum, located in the former Stasi headquarters.

Alexander Scheller – Anna Funder's boss at the television station for which she works in 1996.

Uwe Schmidt – One of Anna Funder's colleagues at the television station for which she works in 1996.

Major Fleischer – A Stasi officer and suspect interrogator who demanded that Miriam Weber tell him about the "underground organization" that helped Miriam escape from East Berlin (though in fact there was no such organization).

Mikhail Gorbachev – The Secretary General of the Soviet Union from 1885 to 1991, during which the **Berlin Wall** was torn down, the East German state collapsed, and the Soviet Union itself fell apart, thanks largely to his liberal policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost*.

Karl Marx – The German philosopher, economist, and critical theorist who penned *Capital* and *The Communist Manifesto*, the two central texts of modern Communism.

Herr Winz – A former Stasi officer with whom Anna Funder speaks, Herr Winz worked in counter-espionage from 1961 to 1990, during which he wrote a lengthy thesis on NATO infiltration.

Irene Behrend – The mother of Julia Behrend.

Dieter Behrend – The father of Julia Behrend.

Major N. – A Stasi official who tries and fails to intimidate Julia Behrend into betraying her Italian ex-boyfriend.

Frau Anderson – An employee of the multimedia center where the East German TV headquarters used to stand.

Frau Marta von Schnitzler – The wife of Karl-Eduard von Schnitzler.

Rupert Murdoch – The Australian media magnate who controls the organization that owns, among many other companies, 20th Century Fox, Fox Broadcasting, The Wall Street Journal, and HarperCollins.

Herr Christian – A former Stasi officer who now works as a private detective.

Herr Bock – A former Stasi officer who specialized in recruiting and controlling informers.

Torsten Paul – The son of Frau Paul.

Dr. Hinze – An East German man who tried to send his son Michael Hinze into West Germany.

Michael Hinze – The son of Dr. Hinze.

Werner Coch – An East German man who tried and failed to sneak into West Berlin in the 1960s.

Karl Wilhelm Fricke – A famous German journalist who was arrested by the Stasi for his allegedly subversive broadcasting and risked his life by telling his listeners about how the Stasi had tried to bully him into keeping quiet.

Herr Bohnsack – A former Stasi officer who worked in Division X, the department that focused on spreading disinformation about West Germany.

Heinrich Heine – 19th century German Romantic poet whose statue is a popular tourist destination in Berlin.

Herr Raillard – Head of the Stasi File Authority office, the institution that houses and reassembles **shredded Stasi surveillance files**.

Heinz Koch – The father of Hagen Koch, a schoolteacher and one-time mayoral candidate.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

AUTHORITARIANISM AND THE EAST GERMAN STATE

Most of *Stasiland* takes place in Berlin in 1996, seven years after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse, soon after, of the East German state. Following the end of World War Two, Eastern Europe fell under the control of the Communist Soviet Union. Countries such as Hungary, Yugoslavia, and half of Germany functioned as satellite states: the Soviet Union provided the states with funding and military support, and in many cases hand-picked the states' leaders to ensure Communist policies were enacted. In East Germany, as in the Soviet Union itself, the government ruled its people via authoritarian and even tyrannical policies. While the extent of the East German state's authoritarianism is still disputed, *Stasiland* posits that in general East Germany left a black mark on German history, from which the country is still recovering.

For decades, the East German state was effectively run by two people, Erich Mielke, the Minister for State Security, and Erich

Honecker, the Secretary-General. Together, Mielke and Honecker used a combination of authoritarian techniques to control their citizens and maintain their power. First, and most fundamentally, the East German state maintained power through its use of force. Mielke and Honecker were both Soviet-trained soldiers, and during their time in office they commanded a vast, powerful military force: the East German army itself, but also the Stasi, the secret police and surveillance agency. Through the Stasi, anyone who openly opposed the East German state's leaders or policies could be arrested, imprisoned, tortured, and executed. The German military also built the **Berlin Wall** in order to prevent citizens from sneaking into West Germany, and the Stasi kept extensive surveillance files on German citizens (see "Surveillance and Privacy").

But the German state didn't maintain power simply through military might. Like many Communist states, it devoted a huge portion of its budget to producing propaganda, some of it intended for other countries and some of it intended for its own citizens. East German propaganda ridiculed Western, capitalist values—there was even a channel, "the Black Channel," whose sole purpose was to make fun of TV programs in West Berlin. In the later years of the East German state, propaganda largely failed as a means of persuading the people to obey their leaders. East Germans cooperated with the Stasi because they feared for their lives, not because they genuinely believed the Stasi were virtuous and West Berlin was evil. Nevertheless, propaganda and "soft power" were instrumental in maintaining a sense of unity, optimism, and obedience in East Germany for many years.

Anna Funder portrays the East German state as a tyrannical, authoritarian organization, and in fact, the entire book is centered around this theme. Some of the state officials she interviews genuinely believe in the virtues of Communism, or argue that the capitalist West has "smeared" East Germany to benefit their own image. However, Funder makes it very clear that East Germany was exactly what it appears to have been: a corrupt, tyrannical regime. Historians have argued that West Germany (and the United States) criticized East Berlin for many practices that it engaged in itself, such as surveillance and military aggression. However, Funder doesn't seem interested in moral relativism: while she acknowledges that West Germany wasn't perfect, her subject is East Germany and its evils. In short, Funder begins from the premise that the East German state was responsible for untold amounts of misery, frustration, and guilt. Over the course of *Stasiland*, she explores the ways that various East Germans have dealt with their government's authoritarian behavior.

SURVEILLANCE AND PRIVACY

Perhaps the most important aspect of the East German tyranny that Anna Funder explores in *Stasiland* is surveillance. Under the leadership of Erich Mielke, the Stasi monitored a staggering number of East German citizens, many of whom had done nothing illegal, violating these citizens' right to privacy. Some estimates suggest that there used to be almost 100,000 Stasi employees running surveillance on the country, plus an additional 173,000 informers. The Stasi accumulated millions of pages of files on ordinary German people—if these files were stacked end-to-end, they'd stretch nearly two hundred kilometers. One of the key topics that Funder studies in her book is what it was like for millions of Germans to live under the constant threat of surveillance.

The East Germans reacted to the knowledge that their rights to privacy were being violated in numerous ways. Some tried to convince themselves that, as per the totalitarian cliché, if they had nothing to hide then they had nothing to fear. But over time, it became clear that this wasn't true. The Stasi ran surveillance on millions of people who'd committed no crimes and done nothing wrong, and sometimes illegally detained and tortured suspects without any proof of wrongdoing. Over time, then, many East Germans came to accept the fact that they'd be monitored, no matter what they'd done. Many of these people went even further and informed on their friends and family in the hopes of protecting themselves from danger. (Funder doesn't speak to many people who ratted out their loved ones to the Stasi, and it isn't hard to understand why—most of those informers would be far too ashamed to discuss their betrayals with an Australian journalist.) As a result of the constant threat of surveillance and betrayal, both from the Stasi and from other civilians, some East Germans tried to escape from the country. Naturally, some succeeded while others failed, and were imprisoned or executed. But many more Germans had to live in a constant state of fear, uncertainty, and paranoia, knowing that they could be betrayed, arrested, and imprisoned at any time.

Stasi surveillance and the right to privacy are still topics of vigorous debate in Germany after the collapse of the East German state. Even though the Stasi themselves are no more, the millions of pages of surveillance files—some **shredded**, some not—are still around, creating a question of whether they should be destroyed permanently or reassembled and read. While it's generally agreed that the Stasi had no right to run surveillance on German citizens, it's also agreed that, now that the surveillance records *exist*, people have a right to read through their own personal files in private. Funder further objects to the slow pace at which the government is reassembling the files: at the current rate, most East Germans will be dead by the time they receive their files. The fact that, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, people are still arguing, fighting, and weeping over Stasi surveillance shows that the Stasi's immoral violations of the right to privacy will continue to hurt people for years to come. But perhaps by gaining access to their personal files, Funder cautiously suggests, people could

fully grasp the evils of the East German government, and fight to prevent such a government from coming into existence ever again.

GRIEF AND MEMORY

In *Stasiland*, Anna Funder isn't simply writing a history of East Germany under a Communist regime. By interviewing dozens of Germans about their experiences under this regime, she shows how people live with history—or, put another way, how an entire country of people go on living, having survived some almost unspeakably painful events.

When burdened with painful memories, Funder shows, East Germans cope in various ways. Some people try to deny or repress these painful memories. In particular, former officials of the East German government or members of the Stasi refuse to acknowledge what they and their peers did, even when Funder confronts them with the evidence. In denying the facts, they try to preserve their own dignity, rather than admitting that they incarcerated innocent people, violated the right to privacy, etc. But East Germans don't repress the past simply out of guilt. Many of the people Funder interviews admit that they haven't thought about their painful experiences with the Stasi in a long time. It's easier for them to ignore painful memories than to think about them every day.

Other characters in *Stasiland* are shown to pursue the opposite strategy: instead of trying to make themselves forget the past, they seek to re-experience it or learn more about it. Miriam Weber, whose husband Charlie may have been murdered by the Stasi, has spent decades trying to learn the truth about her husband. She tries to contact government officials and read surveillance files on her husband, hoping that she'll find out what really happened. While Funder is sympathetic to Miriam's behavior, she also expresses skepticism that learning the truth will help her cope with her sadness at her husband's death. Miriam seems to be motivated by a compulsion, rather than a conscious, rational choice. She wants to use the truth to reach some kind of closure with her grief, but there's no guarantee that she'll ever achieve this closure—and the same could be said for any of the grieving, traumatized Germans to whom Funder speaks.

As Miriam's behavior would indicate, there is no reliable cure for grief: East Germans' painful memories may well continue to haunt them for the rest of their lives. Nevertheless, Funder seems to believe that confronting the past, and facing the truth, is the only way to move forward with life (even if there's no guarantee of success). The alternative—repressing the truth, or denying that it happened at all—only leads to more pain, more guilt, and more self-hatred.

BRAVERY AND HEROISM

While *Stasiland* is a depressing book in parts, there are many moments in which Funder depicts ordinary East German people behaving with remarkable bravery. There are probably more specific examples of characters standing up to the Stasi and the East German government, in fact, than there are specific instances of characters betraying their friends, cooperating with the Stasi, or compromising their beliefs. In part, this is because of selection bias: the people who behaved bravely and morally under East German rule are the same people who'd be most likely to talk to Funder about their experiences. Nevertheless, Funder doesn't simply glorify her characters. While she respects their bravery, she's also skeptical of the concept of heroism itself, and shows how what most people call heroism is often a combination of recklessness, desperation, and pure foolishness.

At various points in *Stasiland*, Funder shows how her characters' courage was really a matter of necessity—they were so desperate to protect themselves that they were willing to risk their own safety. For example, Julia Behrend, the owner of the apartment in which Funder stays, stands up to her Stasi interrogator, Major N., when he tries to pressure her into informing on her Italian ex-boyfriend. Julia, a teenager at the time, refuses to comply with Major N.'s request, not exactly because she's a brave person, but because she has very little left to lose. The Stasi, skeptical of her relationship, have effectively barred her from getting a job of any kind. Similarly, Miriam Weber risks her life trying to sneak past the Berlin Wall—not because she's particularly courageous or heroic but because she knows she'll be imprisoned and treated cruelly if she stays in East Berlin. More generally, one could argue that the East German state collapsed because it practically forced its people to rise up against it. The German revolutionaries were brave, but they also had very little left to lose—marching against Mielke and Honecker was the courageous thing and the right thing, but also the rational thing. Funder has a tremendous amount of admiration for her subjects' courage in the face of tyranny, but she tempers this admiration with some skepticism for the concept of heroism itself. One doesn't have to be a larger-than-life hero, she suggests, in order to be brave.

Funder further questions the concept of bravery by showing how sometimes this "virtue" is the product of not thinking things through. Miriam is just a teenager when she risks her life trying to sneak into West Berlin—she's so young and reckless that she doesn't stop to consider what will happen if she fails. Similarly, Frau Paul, who multiple characters recommend to Funder as the quintessential example of a tough, brave East German, refuses to cooperate with Stasi agents, even after they offer to reunite her with her sickly child, Torsten. Paul makes a brave decision, but, as Funder notes, she doesn't stop to consider the consequences of her actions—either for

Torsten or for herself. As a result, years go by before she's able to see her child, and she continues to live with her guilt at having refused a chance to take care of her baby.

Most books about bravery and heroism focus on the heroic act itself. Funder takes a wiser, more expansive view of the subject, however, studying how "brave" people live with themselves and their choices, often in a great deal of emotional pain. It's crucial to keep in mind that Funder isn't criticizing or denigrating her characters in any way—just because she questions the categories of bravery and heroism doesn't mean she doesn't admire Miriam, Frau Paul, Julia, and the millions of other East Germans who risked their safety and happiness. Rather, Funder opts for a more nuanced, realistic portrayal of these people, resisting the kind of easy, one-dimensional hero-worship that's more characteristic of East German propaganda than of good nonfiction.

MUSEUMS AND ARTIFACTS

Stasiland is about the ways that individual characters deal with the legacy of history, but it's also about how Germany itself deals with its history—not just the atrocities of the East German regime, but of World War Two, the Holocaust, and events even further removed in time from the present day. In particular, Funder discusses the dozens of museums that opened throughout Germany in the years following the fall of the Berlin Wall: there are multiple Wall Museums, a Stasi Museum, a history museum in Leipzig, and more. Funder suggests that these museums are indicative of a trend that might be termed "museumization"—not just the literal building of museums, but the more general practice of converting objects from the past into artifacts, meant to be displayed, viewed, and learned from. Throughout the nineties, German society began to categorize and display the artifacts of East German history, in the hopes that these artifacts would remind Germany of its past but also guide the country into the future.

Funder's central point is that museums (and museumization) don't just collect or categorize objects from the past: they offer a particular interpretation of the past as well. Often, gathering artifacts together in a museum is an act of victory. For example, Funder notes that the former Stasi headquarters—once the most feared building in all of East Berlin—has been converted into a Stasi museum, and the former Stasi officers' headquarters have become viewing galleries for thousands of eager tourists. By converting the Stasi headquarters in this way, the new German state sends a clear, triumphant, and arguably self-congratulatory message: namely, that the benevolent, open-minded German government has converted what was once a secretive, totalitarian institution into an open, public space.

At the same time, museumization communicates the message that the past is, in a word, past. By displaying artifacts of East German history behind glass, museums subtly imply that East Germany is *just* history—that the East German state has ceased to hold any real influence over Germans' lives. Funder strongly disagrees with this message: her entire book is about how East Germany does, in fact, continue to influence people's lives long after its collapse. This would explain why Funder finds the various museums she visits in Berlin to be odd and vaguely annoying: they present the legacy of East Germany as a historical curio, arguably disrespecting the lives of the many Germans for whom East Germany is still an intense, psychological reality.

It's important that readers recognize that Funder isn't criticizing museums or the principle of museumization itself. As she says more than once, museums are an important way to teach people, especially young people, about the past. (And furthermore, the new German government's decision to build museums seems much more enlightened than what the East German state did with regard to the Holocaust, i.e., deny that it was ever involved.) Nevertheless, Funder suggests that German authorities are a little *too* eager to build museums and, by the same token, too eager to convert the legacy of the East German state into a part of the distant past. In writing *Stasiland*, by contrast, Funder opts for a gentler, more sensitive approach to East German history, inviting her subjects to talk about how the legacy of the Stasi continues to impact their day-to-day lives.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE PLASTIC PLATE

Herr Koch tells Anna Funder about stealing a tiny plastic plate after leaving the Stasi. The plate commended Koch's division for its "cultural work," and it wasn't a particularly beautiful, interesting, or hotly desired object. Nevertheless, Koch stole the plate as a sign of defiance against the Stasi and East German tyranny itself. Over time, as the Stasi tries harder and harder to recover the plate—eventually charging Koch with theft, and later perjury—the plate becomes a symbol of Koch's defiance and reckless bravery.

SHREDDED DOCUMENTS

The Stasi surveillance apparatus kept detailed files on a staggering number of East German citizens, and in the final days of East Germany, the Stasi were tasked with shredding these files. After much debate, the German state now allows German citizens to look at their own personal files—but first, the files have to be painstakingly reassembled.

The shredded files—which, it's been estimated, will take more than four centuries to reassemble by hand—symbolize the legacy of the Stasi force and the East German surveillance state. These files contain a huge amount of information about German people, some of it disturbing or painful. Throughout the book, Funder questions what will be accomplished by reassembling the shredded documents—in effect, asking what is the purpose of studying history and reliving the past.

THE BERLIN WALL

The central symbol of *Stasiland*—and of Cold War Germany—is the Berlin Wall. For almost thirty years, the Wall divided East and West Berlin, and stood as a symbol for the divide between Western, capitalist society, led by the United States, and Eastern, Communist society, led by the Soviet Union. At various points in the book, Funder characterizes the Wall as a "scar," cruelly cutting families in half and causing an inestimable amount of pain and damage. Ultimately, the Berlin Wall doesn't just symbolize the lengthy, morally ambiguous conflict that was the Cold War—it's also a poignant symbol for the devastation caused by the Cold War, and the deep emotional wounds with which many Germans live even in the 21st century.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Harper Perennial edition of *Stasliand* published in 2011.

Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ 'Have you travelled yourself since the Wall came down?' I ask. She throws her head back. I see she is wearing purple eyeliner which, at that angle, phosphoresces.
'Not yet. But I'd like to. Bali, something like that. Or China. Yes, China.'

Related Characters: Anna Funder (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 3

Explanation and Analysis

In the opening scene of *Stasiland*, Anna Funder, the narrator, walks through Alexanderplatz station and talks to an elderly woman about her experiences in East Germany. The woman claims to have lived in East Germany—a Communist, authoritarian state—for decades. As a result, she was, in effect, unable to leave the country. When Funder asks her if she's left the country since the collapse of the East German state, she admits that she hasn't, though she has ambitions to travel somewhere far away.

The passage elegantly conveys one of the central themes of Funder's book: long after the reunification of Germany, the impact of East Germany can still be felt. One would think that, after so many years of virtual imprisonment, the elderly woman would want to get out and explore the rest of the world. But of course, it's not that easy. After so much time, the woman has grown to accept her place (even if she had the means to leave at all)—she remains docile, obedient, and satisfied with being cut off from the rest of the world. In this sense, East Germany lives on after its collapse, in the minds of its citizens.

❝ The Stasi guards had asked to see the demonstrators' identity cards, in a strange parody of the control they were, at that very moment, losing. The demonstrators, in shock, obediently pulled their cards from their wallets. Then they seized the building.

Related Characters: Anna Funder (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 6

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Funder briefly describes the collapse of the East German state. For many years, the government of East Germany controlled its people through the Stasi, the secret police force and its associated system of informants. Then, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, East German demonstrators overpowered the massive Stasi police force, raiding Stasi headquarters. Bizarrely, the Stasi officers asked to see the demonstrators' identification—and even more bizarrely, the demonstrators displayed their IDs before raiding the building.

The passage is a somewhat comic example of an important, serious theme that Funder explores throughout the book: the way that decades of authoritarian government have imprinted themselves on East German citizens. The demonstrators who raided the Stasi headquarters had been conditioned to obey the Stasi throughout their lives—and even after 1989, this obedience and respect for authority continue to be seen in German society.

Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ 'Look.' Uwe touched my forearm gently, turning me towards him like a dance partner. His eyes were green and slanted up, his teeth short and neat, little pearls. 'You're probably right. No-one here is interested—they were backward and they were broke, and the whole Stasi thing...' He trailed off. His breath was minty. 'It's sort of...embarrassing.'

Related Characters: Uwe Schmidt (speaker), Anna Funder

Related Themes:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

Anna Funder temporarily lives in Berlin and supports herself by working for a German TV station, responding to letters from viewers. In her spare time, she pursues the project that eventually became *Stasiland*: interviews with people who lived under the Communist state. Here, Funder explains why *Stasiland* didn't turn out to be a TV program: she tried to pitch a program exploring the lives of ordinary Germans adjusting to the new regime, but her bosses and colleagues refused. They claimed that such a program would be uninteresting, impractical, and—most importantly—embarrassing.

Uwe's choice of words is key, because he's suggesting, without ever saying so explicitly, that Germany isn't yet ready to confront its recent past. Much like Germany immediately after the Holocaust, 1990s Germany seems to want to treat East German history like a historical curiosity, something to be gawked at in museums, but not really acknowledged as a part of contemporary German culture. By writing her book, Funder aims to show how East German history, contrary to what Uwe suggests, is very much a part of contemporary culture, and a crucial part of many Germans' lives to this day.

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ On the eleventh night, Miriam gave them what they wanted. 'I thought, "You people want an underground escape organization? Well, I'll give you one then."'
Fleischer had won.

Related Characters: Anna Funder (speaker), Major Fleischer, Miriam Weber

Related Themes:

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Funder interviews a woman named Miriam who grew up under East German rule. As a teenager, she circulated leaflets denouncing the German government, and she was severely punished. Wanting to avoid further jail time, Miriam tried to sneak into West Berlin, climbing past the newly erected Berlin Wall. Miriam was captured, and her interrogator, a Stasi officer named Major Fleischer, demanded that she give up the names of the people who'd helped her escape. In reality, Miriam had had no help whatsoever—but after ten days of sleep deprivation torture, she decided to save herself further agony, and made up a story about getting help from an underground organization.

The passage is effective in conveying Miriam's own disorientation at the time of her interrogation: she couldn't tell if Major Fleischer actually believed that she had received help, or if he was only trying to exploit his power over her. (Miriam claims that it was utterly obvious that she'd been acting alone.) Fleischer "wins" by pressuring Miriam into giving up names, but of course, the names she gives him are fabrications. The Stasi had the resources to torture and bully thousands of people like Miriam, whose only crime was trying to visit another country (something that wouldn't be considered a crime at all in many other countries).

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ Even in that terrible light, I could still see his head injuries. And I could see his neck—they'd forgotten to cover it up. There were no strangulation marks, nothing.

Related Characters: Miriam Weber (speaker), Karl-Heinz Weber / "Charlie"

Related Themes:

Page Number: 40

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Miriam discusses the aftermath of her husband Charlie's mysterious death. Charlie was, like Miriam, perceived to be an "enemy of the state," and he was imprisoned for helping a friend escape from East Germany. In prison, Charlie supposedly hanged himself. Miriam, however, refused to believe that this was the truth. She was sure that the Stasi had murdered him. Later, when she managed to view Charlie's body, she found that he had no marks on his neck, further suggesting that some foul play

was involved, and that the Stasi story was a lie.

For the last few decades, Miriam has been trying to learn the truth about her husband's death. She never gets a clear answer, but her ongoing struggle for information, as Funder portrays it, mirrors the entire country's ongoing struggle with the trauma of East German history.

> And I think about those Stasi men. They would never in their lives have imagined that they would cease to exist and that their offices would be a museum. A museum!

Related Characters: Miriam Weber (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 46

Explanation and Analysis

Since the fall of the East German government, many of the buildings housing East German officials have been converted into new buildings. For example, the Stasi headquarters, once the most feared building in Berlin, has become a museum. It's a sign of triumph for the new German state that a private, secretive government office building has become an inviting tourist destination. One could interpret this as a symbol of the way that Germany has made an effort to expel authoritarianism from its society and replace it with democracy. More generally speaking, the conversion of Stasi headquarters into a museum is indicative of ways that museum culture provides a distinct interpretation of the past. By displaying the Stasi offices in a museum setting, in other words, the government communicates the point that the Stasi themselves are no more—that they have been confined to the past, and pose no further threat to anyone.

Chapter 6 Quotes

> The German media called East Germany 'the most perfected surveillance state of all time'. At the end, the Stasi had 97,000 employees—more than enough to oversee a country of seventeen million people.

Related Characters: Anna Funder (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

As Funder goes on, she begins to explore the extent of the Stasi surveillance apparatus. For forty years, the Stasi monitored a staggering number of German citizens. The Stasi had almost 100,000 employees, plus a tremendous number of casual informants. This meant that, in effect, there were different "circles" within the Stasi, some more secretive than others. Furthermore, some informers for the Stasi were themselves under investigation. As the passage would suggest, the East German government was able to maintain power over its citizens for so many years largely because it kept such a close eye on them: whenever anybody showed even the slightest sign of rebellion, the Stasi would be able to arrest them. For decades, German citizens had to live in the constant fear of being watched and potentially arrested and imprisoned for expressing even the slightest disapproval for their government.

Chapter 7 Quotes

> It was a close call, but Germany was the only Eastern Bloc country in the end that so bravely, so conscientiously, opened its files on its people to its people.

Related Characters: Anna Funder (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 71

Explanation and Analysis

After the reunification of Germany, there were still many ethical problems to address. In particular, there was a lively debate over what should be done with the millions of shredded pages of surveillance files on German citizens. Some believed that these shredded files should be destroyed permanently, since they should never have been created in the first place. Others argued, successfully, that individual German citizens should be permitted to read their own private files, now that these files *did* exist.

While the German government's actions are commendable, Funder questions whether any ethical purpose can be served by showing people the surveillance files that the Stasi. Individual have the right to read the files the government has kept on them, but this by no means guarantees that they'll gain any wisdom, security, or closure after reading these files. Furthermore, as Funder later shows, the reassembling of shredded files is largely a

symbolic measure, since it will take an extremely long time for all the files to be returned to their "owners."

Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ Either Herr Winz doesn't know much, or he's not telling. He won't respond to my questions about the *Insiderkomitee* or talk about himself either. Each time I ask him about the reality of life in the GDR he returns to the beauties of socialist theory. I think he hopes, through me, to sow the seeds of socialism in an untainted corner of the world.

Related Characters: Anna Funder (speaker), Herr Winz

Related Themes:

Page Number: 85

Explanation and Analysis

Anna Funder interviews several Stasi agents over the course of the book. Some of these agents are willing to talk about their experiences and methods as Stasi operatives, while others, such as Herr Winz, interviewed in Chapter Eight, stay tight-lipped. Winz claims that he has nothing to say about his time in the Stasi, except that he wishes he could tell the rest of the world about the glories of the socialist East German state.

It's interesting that Funder doesn't directly challenge Herr Winz's sincerity—and the same is true of her other interviews with former Stasi officers. Most of these officers claim to be sincerely committed to socialism, Communism, and East German values, and Funder never contradicts their claims explicitly. Nevertheless, Winz's behavior could be interpreted as a kind of coping mechanism: he's so guilty about what he did as a Stasi operative that he immerses himself in idealism and theory, deluding others—and himself—into believing that he was doing the right thing for all those years with the Stasi.

Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ Whenever he stayed with her, the surveillance was intense and overt.
The couple could hardly leave the house without being stopped by the police and asked to account for themselves.

Related Characters: Anna Funder (speaker), Julia Behrend

Related Themes:

Page Number: 99

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Funder learns more about her sub-letter, Julia Behrend. Julia grew up in East Germany at a time when the Stasi were in full power. Julia excelled at languages, and her future looked bright; however, she began dating an Italian man, and the Stasi then started to monitor her and intimidate her. They prevented her from getting a job, and, as Julia later learned, they tapped her phones.

In retrospect, it seems more than a little ridiculous that the Stasi would have allocated so many resources to run surveillance on a teenaged girl with a boyfriend. But of course, as Funder has already shown, the Stasi had the resources to provide this surveillance for almost all German citizens—therefore, they didn't have to be too discerning in choosing which people to monitor. Even the slightest irregularities (dating an Italian, for example) were enough to provoke them.

Chapter 11 Quotes

❝ Her voice is slow. 'I think I'd totally repressed that entire episode,' she says. 'Maybe what came later, the whole 1989 story, was so severe that other things just fell away. Otherwise, I can't explain it.'

Related Characters: Julia Behrend (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 113

Explanation and Analysis

Julia Behrend continues to tell Funder about her experiences dealing with the Stasi as a teenager. After breaking up with her Italian boyfriend, a Stasi officer named "Major N." asked Julia to give the Stasi more information about him. Julia was very intimidated by the encounter; in fact, she tells Funder that, until discussing it with Funder, she'd practically "repressed" the experience.

Julia's explanation is in fact very common for people who've lived through sudden, painful experiences. Rather than relive her traumatic experience every day, Julia represses her memories (unconsciously) in an attempt to have a normal life. Her behavior is, one could argue, representative of the behavior of Germany as a whole: rather than confronting the past (and potentially coming to terms with it), Germany has, by and large, chosen to deny, ignore, or

trivialize East German history.

Julia doesn't know why the Stasi was afraid of them complaining to Honecker. Possibly because both her parents were teachers, and outwardly conformist, or because the Stasi had no 'legal' basis for what it had done to her. Who knows? It is one of the very rare occasions when the bluff was called and someone 'won' against the Firm.
'The amazing thing was,' Julia says, 'the next week I was rung up about a job.' She was taken on as a receptionist in a hotel. It looked like she would work there for her lifetime.

Related Characters: Julia Behrend (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 117

Explanation and Analysis

Julia goes on to explain to Funder how she reacted to Major N.'s request that she cooperate with the Stasi and betray her ex-boyfriend. After speaking to her parents and seeking their advice, Julia refused and threatened to write a letter directly to Erich Honecker, complaining about Major N.'s harassment. To Julia's amazement, Major N. agreed to back off; he even set Julia up with a job, where previously he and his colleagues had worked hard to prevent Julia from getting work of any kind.

To this day, Julia isn't sure why Major N. backed off so easily. Perhaps he was genuinely frightened that Julia would embarrass him to Erich Honecker. Or perhaps he just realized that running surveillance on Julia's ex-boyfriend wasn't worth all the trouble. It's a mark of the Stasi's bureaucracy and secretiveness that Julia still can't explain why her life changed so dramatically. But it also shows that, under the right circumstances, and if pushed to their limits, ordinary East Germans could stand up to the Stasi and win.

Chapter 13 Quotes

And when we started to get tied up in this ridiculous GDR success propaganda—exaggerated harvest results and production levels and so on—I withdrew from that altogether and confined myself to my specialist area: the work against imperialism.

Related Characters: Karl-Eduard von Schnitzler (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 135

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Anna Funder goes to speak to one of the most important figures of the East German media, Karl-Eduard von Schnitzler. For many years, von Schnitzler was the voice of the "Black Channel," the channel that showed West German media. Von Schnitzler would provide commentary for whatever films, news, or TV shows were being aired, and as a result he was widely despised in East Germany—he ruined some of the only good TV entertainment East Germans could access (East German television, Funder explains, was nobody's idea of a good time).

When Funder interviews von Schnitzler, he tells Funder about how he focused on a certain *kind* of propaganda—the propaganda glorifying East German values and beliefs—rather than the kind that dealt in outright lies; for example, propaganda stating that East Germany had had a good harvest. Von Schnitzler's behavior mirrors a common coping mechanism for people who suffer from guilt and self-loathing. He admits that he was involved in propaganda, but then tries to separate himself from the "worst" practitioners of propaganda. In this way he implies that, although he wasn't perfect, there were many others worse than he.

Chapter 14 Quotes

She is convinced that, in the amnesties of 1990, mistakes were made and the serial rapist was released. 'It was terrible that this happened to me right at that time,' she says. 'It meant that before the good things about the west got to us, this negative thing—the letting loose of the criminals—affected me.'

Related Characters: Anna Funder, Julia Behrend (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 144

Explanation and Analysis

Funder continues to talk with Julia Behrend, and here, she learns that Julia was raped shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall by a strange man in an elevator. Julia testified against her rapist in court—an experience that left her depressed and anxious. Even after the rapist was sentenced to jail time, Julia suspects that he was freed in the amnesty period of the German reunification—a time during which many people who'd been imprisoned under the old German government

were allowed to go free. As Julia tells Funder, she remembers the reunification period with mixed emotions: while she was pleased with the political changes in her country, she couldn't share in the mood of elation because she was understandably worried about having to testify against her rapist, and about her rapist then being freed.

The passage is a sobering, tragic reminder of why it's so important for Funder to compile a book based on individuals' accounts of the fall of the Berlin Wall. The reunification of Germany is often celebrated as the beginning of a "glorious new era in German history," a blanket statement that neglects the experiences of many people like Julia, who continued to go through pain and suffering after reunification, and whose fortunes didn't particularly improve.

❝ There's order everywhere else in German life—even the handicapped are labeled with yellow (yellow!) armbands.

Related Characters: Anna Funder (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 147

Explanation and Analysis

After speaking with Julia, Funder is understandably shaken: she's just listened to Julia talk about being raped, and having to testify against her rapist in court. Funder goes back home and then goes to the local pool. While looking out at the water, she notices that some of the people in the pool are required to wear yellow armbands, signaling that they're disabled (blind or deaf). For Funder, this is still shocking, since yellow insignias were once a way of identifying Jews and other "undesirables" during the Holocaust.

The point Funder seems to be making in this passage is that, although Germany has come a long way since the end of Holocaust and the fall of the Berlin Wall, there are still occasional signs of authoritarianism that cause her to worry for the country's future. The people have been trained, over the course of many decades, to obey the government—to the point where they dutifully wear their proper armbands. For Funder, this behavior stands as one of the most sinister legacies of Germany's harsh, authoritarian tradition.

Chapter 16 Quotes

❝ Was this the point? Was Koch using the available evidence—in this case a bicycle permit—to construct or confirm a story of his father's innocence during the war? There's clearly a portion of the past here that cannot be pinned down with facts, or documents. All that exists is permission to ride a bike.

Related Characters: Anna Funder (speaker), Heinz Koch , Hagen Koch

Related Themes:

Page Number: 160

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Funder interviews a man named Hagen Koch, who once worked for the Stasi. Hagen's father, Hagen explains, was briefly a Nazi soldier, though he later became involved with the Soviet Union. As Koch explains some things about his father's early life, he informs Funder that the Russians gave him a bicycle as a sign of their respect for him. Funder is confused about why Hagen is bringing this up. She guesses that Hagen is concealing something from her—presumably, something about his father's morally questionable behavior during World War Two.

The passage is important because it shows Funder reading between the lines of what her interviewee says, rather than simply absorbing the information uncritically. By definition, the people who choose to sit down and interview with Anna Funder are probably less likely to harbor guilt and self-loathing than many other East Germans (since, if they did feel these emotions, they probably wouldn't talk to a reporter at all). But even so, Funder listens to her subjects very carefully, trying to understand the dark secrets they may be hiding from her.

Chapter 17 Quotes

❝ The Stasi subjected him to disciplinary proceedings on account of 'inconstancy', and in their files attributed the remarriage to 'the repeated negative influence of Frau Koch'.

Related Characters: Anna Funder (speaker), Hagen Koch

Related Themes:

Page Number: 176

Explanation and Analysis

Hagen Koch continues to tell Anna Funder about his experiences working with the Stasi. As a Stasi operative,

every part of his life was closely scrutinized. Thus, after Koch announced that he was going to marry the woman he loved, his Stasi colleagues were displeased—they didn't think that the woman was an acceptable bride for a Stasi officer. They imprisoned Koch and pressured his wife into getting a divorce. Then, when Koch was released from prison, he became furious with his wife for agreeing to the divorce, and actually divorced her. Then he relented, and they got married again. In a bitter irony, the Stasi further punished Koch for his inconstancy—when, in fact, it was the Stasi itself who caused his "inconstant" behavior.

The passage is a tragic example of how the Stasi drove families apart through manipulation and coercion. Because they pressured Koch's wife into signing divorce papers, Koch came to distrust her and actually *did* agree to divorce her. Not even Stasi officers were immune from their own organization's surveillance.

Chapter 18 Quotes

You know though, it was worth it. All the courage I had is in that plate. The whole shitty little *skerrick* of it. That's all I had.

Related Characters: Hagen Koch (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 182

Explanation and Analysis

After being expelled from the Stasi, Hagen Koch steals something from the office—a small plastic plate commemorating his department's service. The plate itself is worthless, and Hagen never particular cared about it before stealing it. But after he steals the plate, it becomes an important symbol of his resistance to the Stasi authority. The Stasi try to force him to return the plate, but he insists that he doesn't know where it is. Then, years later, when TV reporters interview him, the Stasi authorities notice the plate in the background of his apartment and once again try to recover it. Over time, the plastic plate becomes a worthy cause for Hagen: he doesn't particularly care about it, and it wouldn't cost him anything to return it, but out of pride, stubbornness, and reckless courage, he decides to hang on to it. The plate is, one could argue, a symbol of the tiny forms of defiance that ordinary East Germans found. Not everybody took to the streets to demonstrate, but many East Germans showed their defiance in other, smaller ways.

Chapter 19 Quotes

Klaus worked for years in the west as a sound-man in the theatre. After the Wall came down, he found out that 'we'd become a cult band in the GDR—our records were more expensive than a Pink Floyd album'.

Related Characters: Anna Funder, Klaus Jentzsch (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 191

Explanation and Analysis

One of Anna Funder's closest friends in Berlin is a musician named Klaus Jentzsch. Klaus was a major rock star in the 1970s, but after being stripped of his music license, he was effective blacklisted in East Germany. His music wasn't sold in stores or played on the radio. Klaus later found out that the East German government didn't renew his music license (which, at the time, all musicians had to carry) because it disapproved of his allegedly subversive behavior, and his fondness for American and British rock music. To Klaus's great surprise, however, he returned to East Germany to discover he'd become a cult figure, beloved of the Germans not only because of his talents but because he'd become a symbol of defiance. Like David Bowie and Frank Zappa, Klaus became a legend in East Germany: a living symbol of free speech and artistic integrity.

Chapter 20 Quotes

Here he is once more getting the trust of his people and selling them cheap.

Related Characters: Anna Funder (speaker), Herr Bock

Related Themes:

Page Number: 202

Explanation and Analysis

Funder interviews an ex-Stasi agent named Herr Bock. Bock used to be an important Stasi operative, but unlike many other Stasi operatives, he's managed to prosper in the new German state, too. He works as a business consultant, helping West German companies buy up their East German competitors. Evidently, Bock had no particular loyalty to East German government or ideology—he just sells his

services to the highest bidder. The passage is one of the bitterest in the entire book: Funder doesn't tell Bock what she thinks of him, but she makes no secret of her disdain to the reader. At the very least, Funder is willing to respect some Stasi agents who sincerely believed in socialist ideals; however, she has no respect for a "hired gun" who sells his own people cheap.

Chapter 22 Quotes

❝ It seems to me that Frau Paul, as one does, may have overestimated her own strength, her resistance to damage, and that she is now, for her principles, a lonely, teary guilt-wracked wreck.

Related Characters: Anna Funder (speaker), Frau Paul

Related Themes:

Page Number: 221

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Funder meets with Frau Paul, a woman who, years ago, turned down an opportunity to be with her sickly child, Torsten. Frau Paul had just given birth when the Berlin Wall was erected, and as a result, she was unable to join Torsten in the West German hospital where he was being cared for. She tried and failed several times to cross the Berlin Wall illegally, and on one of these attempts, Stasi officers caught her. They offered her a deal: inform on her friends, and she'd be allowed to see her child. Amazingly, Frau Paul refused to cooperate. As a result, she was unable to see Torsten for five years.

Funder is impressed by Frau Paul's toughness in the face of Stasi intimidation. However, she's also realistic enough to recognize that Frau Paul isn't exactly a "hero," as many people would say she is. Paul acted bravely, but in part she behaved this way because she didn't really think through the consequences of her actions—she had no way of knowing the pain and guilt she'd cause herself later in life. Perhaps this reckless disregard for one's own happiness is the core of what most people would term heroism: a disregard that often leaves the so-called hero a "guilt-wracked wreck."

Chapter 25 Quotes

❝ I am working in a feminist bookshop near Berkeley, and have made some friends. We went on a 'Reclaim the Night' march recently, something that made me feel real positive, and far away from Thüringen and everything that happened here.

Related Characters: Julia Behrend (speaker), Anna Funder

Related Themes:

Page Number: 246

Explanation and Analysis

Julia Behrend sends Anna Funder a letter, explaining that she's no longer living in Germany: she's moved to Berkeley, where she's become involved in feminist causes, and marches in the "Reclaim the Night" movement, which aims to protect rape victims. The passage links the chapter back to Julia's earlier confession to Funder, in which she told Funder that she was raped shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Stasiland is, in many ways, a book about how people cope, or don't cope, with tragedy. After enduring the horror of being raped, Julia seems to cope with her feelings by leaving Berlin and becoming involved in feminist and anti-rape causes. (Of course, there may be many other reasons why Julia moved to California and participated in "Reclaim the Night," but as Funder presents the information to us, Julia's behavior is at least partly a result of her own traumatic experiences.)

Chapter 27 Quotes

❝ He is telling me, in his quiet way, that the resources united Germany is throwing at this part of reconstructing the lives of its former East German citizens are pitiful, some kind of Sisyphean joke. What he is running here is an almost totally symbolic act.

Related Characters: Anna Funder (speaker), Herr Raillard

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 269

Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter 27, Funder visits the official Stasi record center, in which a small team of workers painstakingly tries to reassemble the untold millions of pages of shredded documents that the Stasi left behind in 1989. The German government has mandated that the files be reassembled and returned to the people they concern; however, the files are being reassembled so slowly that many people will die before they ever get a chance to read their own files. Clearly, the government could allocate more money to

speed the process up, but they don't—the reassembling of files is almost strictly a symbolic gesture.

Why doesn't the government want the files to be reassembled too quickly? Funder doesn't offer a reason, but it's possible that the new German government is afraid that the German people won't trust them. Or perhaps the new government is worried that too many people will try to sue the Stasi, creating more bureaucracy and more chaos. Whatever the reason, the passage shows that the struggle to learn about East German history is far from over, and that the current German government has failed to allocate the resources necessary for this important project.

Chapter 28 Quotes

Things have been put behind glass, but it is not yet over.

Related Characters: Anna Funder (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 280

Explanation and Analysis

In the final chapter of the book, Anna Funder writes about the sudden rise of museums in German following the fall of the Berlin Wall. There's a Berlin Wall museum, a Stasi museum, and many other institutions presenting the history of the East German state. From Funder's perspective, there's something fundamentally wrong about museums of this kind. She argues that museums present history as being, metaphorically speaking, "behind glass"—as something that happened a long time ago, without any real relevance to the present day. Funder disagrees that East German history should be put behind glass—in *Stasiland*, she shows how it continues to exert a profound influence on the lives of contemporary Germans. The contemporary German state wants to relegate East Germany to the distant past; the German people, Funder suggests, aren't ready to do that yet.

I have been sown
Only my head sticks
Defiant, out of the earth
But one day it too will be mown
Making me, finally
Of this land.

Related Characters: Karl-Heinz Weber / "Charlie" (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 282

Explanation and Analysis

In the final pages of the book, Anna reads a poem by Charlie, the deceased husband of Miriam Weber, who supposedly hanged himself in his jail cell. For years, Miriam has been trying to learn the truth about Charlie's death—she continues to suspect that Stasi agents murdered him. Charlie's poem, which Miriam gives to Funder, is about the relationship between Charlie and his "land," by which Charlie, one can argue, means the East German state. Charlie writes about defying his land, despite being imprisoned and pushed into the ground. This could be a heavily metaphorical way of talking about how Charlie continued to denounce East German tyranny, even after he'd been censored and arrested. Chillingly, Charlie seems to prophesize his own death—one day his head will be "mown." However, the poem strikes a defiant, triumphant tone, as Charlie vows to continue crying out for as long as he has a head.

The poem is the perfect way to conclude *Stasiland*, because it captures the mixture of danger, defiance, and longing that characterized life in East Germany for so many years. People like Charlie spoke out against their society, and they were punished by being imprisoned, tortured, and buried in the ground—yet at the same time they felt intimately tied to this "land" and the very country that oppressed them.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1: BERLIN, WINTER 1996

Anna Funder walks through Berlin's Alexanderplatz station. She is trying to catch the train to Leipzig, a neighboring city. At the station, she walks to the nearest toilet. It's cold, and there's an old woman standing by the stairs. The woman asks Funder about the weather and then mutters, "This is nothing." She explains that she's lived in Berlin for twenty-one years, since 1975, and has seen much worse. She claims that she "had a prince once." However, she was unable to visit him, since he lived on the other side of the **Berlin Wall**. Skeptical, Funder asks if the woman has traveled to the other side since 1989. The woman says, "Not yet. But I'd like to."

In the first paragraphs, Funder immediately establishes herself as an outsider in East Berlin. She also alludes to the main political themes of the book—the separation of East and West Germany, which left many people unable to see or communicate with their loved ones (or "princes") for decades, and the continued legacy of the East German regime on 1990s Germany. The passage suggests that some people, such as this old woman, are still so accustomed to living in authoritarian East Germany that they don't take advantage of the new freedom of travel following its collapse.

On the train, Funder contemplates the previous night, during which she visited a pub with her friend Klaus. Funder then thinks back to learning German years ago in an Australian school. In the 1980s, she went to live in West Berlin. The German Democratic Republic (i.e., East Berlin) no longer exists, but she's now traveling through its remains.

Funder is a good example of a time-honored literary archetype: the flâneur, *or "stroller." Funder wanders through Berlin and studies the remains of East Germany, in the process painting a picture of how the old regime continues to influence the present.*

Funder visited Leipzig in 1994, five years after the fall of the **Berlin Wall** in November 1989. The city was at the heart of a "turning point" in German history—a peaceful revolution against Communism. Now, in 1996, she's returning to Leipzig. She visits the former headquarters of the Stasi, the East German police force. The Stasi were tasked with knowing everything about its citizens, and yet they failed to predict the fall of Communism itself. Now their headquarters are a museum.

In just a few years, East Germany has gone from an authoritarian state to a democratic, capitalist society. But the transition isn't as clean and easy as some have claimed. Germany is still full of remnants of its darker past, such as the Stasi HQ. By converting the building into a museum, the new German government seems to assert its own authority over its predecessor, turning a symbol of tyranny into a symbol of education (and victory).

The Stasi kept such detailed records of East German citizens that, if laid end to end, they'd stretch almost 200 kilometers. In 1989, when demonstrators marched through Stasi headquarters, guards demanded to see their ID cards—reflexively, the demonstrators pulled out their cards, and then "seized the building." The Stasi had complex methods for monitoring German citizens. One of the more ludicrous methods was to keep samples of suspects' "smells" in a jar, so that dogs could be trained to respond to them.

The East German state was so effective in its propaganda and surveillance that an entire generation of people—even those who went on to rebel against it—were practically conditioned to obey the Stasi at all costs. In retrospect, many Stasi practices seem needlessly complicated and even comical, but at the time they were the most feared and hated people in the country.

The curator of the Stasi Museum, Frau Hollitzer, tells Funder about a woman named Miriam, whose husband was arrested by the Stasi. Fascinated and horrified, Funder decides to research "the stories from this land gone wrong."

Here, Funder establishes the scope of her project: she will travel around East Germany (mostly Berlin and Leipzig), studying the legacy of the East German state by interviewing individual people.

CHAPTER 2: MIRIAM

Funder works in television in the former West Berlin. Her boss is a man named Alexander Scheller, and her duties include answering letters from German television viewers. Another one of her colleagues is Uwe Schmidt, whose job is essentially "to appear busy and time-short."

Funder works full-time while conducting her interviews. It's interesting that her job involves communicating with (and, presumably taking at least some suggestions from) TV viewers. This suggests that new German TV is less authoritarian and more accommodating of audiences' tastes than was the case in East Germany.

Funder receives a letter from a German viewer regarding the famous "puzzle women"—women who try to reassemble the files the Stasi **shredded** in their final days. The viewer explains that he wants to do a story on what life is like for East Germans living in the mid-1990s. Scheller is reluctant to approve such a story, however. He insists that the East Germans weren't really a nation—just some Germans who happened to live under Communism. Funder is forced to tell the writer that, regrettably, her TV station doesn't have any interest in doing "point of view" stories like the one he's proposed—the station focuses on current affairs. Funder receives another letter from the same viewer, in which he angrily explains that current affairs are *made* from "point of view" stories like the one he's proposed. He compares the current German state to Germany in the postwar years—reluctant to discuss or even acknowledge its recent history.

At first, Funder tries to use her TV connections to study the legacy of East Germany in the 1990s—or, put another way, she tries to integrate her job with her hobby. When this fails, however, Funder is forced to pursue her research on her own time, ultimately publishing her findings in book-form instead of broadcasting them on television. Contemporary German society presents East Germany as a historical phenomenon in museums, but it seems less willing to remember individual stories from former East German citizens. Perhaps this is because individual stories are messier, more challenging, more morally complex, and generally harder to categorize than the kinds of broader historical narratives one finds in a museum.

In 1996, Funder's train arrives in Leipzig. There, Funder meets Miriam Weber, a woman in her mid-forties. Miriam explains to Funder that she became an "Enemy of the State" as a teenager. Back in 1968, she was involved in demonstrations against the destruction of the Leipzig University Church. Later, after the police began attacking demonstrators, Miriam and her friend made pamphlets criticizing the police. A few days later, the Stasi tracked her down. At the time, information in East Germany was closely monitored—even something as simple as checking out a book from the library was subject to strict government surveillance. Miriam spent a month in solitary confinement. Later, she was released to await her trial for the crime of sedition. At the tail end of 1968, she caught a train to Berlin, hoping that she'd be able to escape over the **Berlin Wall**.

Miriam Weber is one of the most important characters in the book, as well as one of the only East Germans with whom Funder meets more than once. Her behavior in the sixties, seventies, and eighties represents many different aspects of the East German experience: the courage of ordinary people under pressure; the cruelty of the Stasi; the omnipresence of government surveillance.

CHAPTER 3: BORNHOLMER BRIDGE

In 1968, Miriam Weber was released from prison in East Berlin, and tried to get past the **Berlin Wall**, to no avail. Dejected, she prepared to board a train back to Leipzig. However, she realized that she might be able to climb over the barbed wire fence separating the train lines on either side of Berlin. At the Bornholmer Bridge station, she studied the fence that separated either side of the city. After dark, she snuck up to the fence and managed to climb over it, cutting herself badly in the process. As Miriam explains all this to Funder, they both laugh—Miriam was barely more than a child, and yet she had the courage to try to cross through one of the world's most dangerous places.

From Funder's perspective (and readers' perspective), Miriam was doing something incredibly brave when she tried to cross the Berlin Wall. But Miriam wasn't even conscious of how brave she was being: she was just a reckless teenager without any strong grasp of her own mortality. It was this recklessness—combined with her desperate desire to get out of East Germany—that enabled Miriam to risk her life at the end of 1968.

After climbing the fence, Miriam saw a large watchdog. Luckily, a train passed at the exact time when the dog noticed her, covering the entire station in a fine steam mist and causing the dog to lose Miriam's scent. Miriam was then able to pass the next barbed wire fence. However, when she'd done so, she accidentally set off the trip wire, triggering an alarm. Eastern German guards arrested her almost immediately. They took her to the hospital, treated the cuts on her hands, and then sent her back to Leipzig.

Miriam came exceptionally close to crossing into West Berlin—only a trip-wire prevented her from leaving her country. Presumably, there must have been some others who managed to sneak into West Berlin around the same time, but Funder doesn't discuss these people—her subject is the people who lived in East Germany and coped with the state's surveillance and authoritarianism.

Back in Leipzig, Miriam was placed in solitary confinement again. She was tortured with sleep deprivation, causing her to become disoriented and lose her sense of time. The guards were sure that Miriam had cooperated with an underground escape group—surely a teenaged girl couldn't have almost escaped from the country on her own. They were particularly bemused that she could have gotten past the dog. The main interrogator, Major Fleischer, would sometimes pretend to be kind to Miriam. But Miriam stuck to her story. After ten days of sleep deprivation, however, Miriam changed her story and claimed that she'd had help from an underground organization.

Sleep deprivation is a common technique in forced interrogations; it causes the victim to lose all sense of time and, eventually, become weak and easily intimidated. Major Fleischer is a perplexing character—one would think that he's been working long enough to understand that Miriam probably didn't have help from an underground organization, and yet he seems hell-bent on pressuring Miriam into "confessing" her collaboration. Perhaps his goal is to use this confession as a threat to force her to inform on her friends and family.

Miriam's story was ridiculous—nobody could have taken it seriously. According to her, she met a member of the underground organization at a restaurant, and the member offered to give her the help she needed to cross into West Berlin, along with a map. At the time, nobody in East Germany would have told a total stranger that they were considering escaping. Nevertheless, Major Fleischer allowed Miriam to rest after she invented her story. She gave him a vivid description of the man who'd helped her.

Miriam portrays Major Fleischer as a rather clueless interrogator—he believes a story that, anyone in East Germany could tell, is patently false. While tortures like sleep deprivation might effectively "break" their victims, the information they finally divulge might then be extremely unreliable.

A week later, Fleischer met with Miriam, furious that she'd lied to him. He explained that now she was up for an even longer prison sentence—but then said that he'd be kind and overlook her lies. Miriam later learned that using sleep deprivation on minors was considered a serious offense, even in East Germany, so Fleischer was just looking out for himself. In the end, Miriam got a year and a half in prison. During her trial, the judge told her that, by crossing the Wall, she could have started World War III.

Even in authoritarian East Germany, there are rules about how officers can and can't treat prisoners, suggesting that the East German government has at least some desire to protect human rights, even if it often sanctions human rights abuses to ensure its own power. The judge's claims are absurd and, as with so many other authorities' claims in this chapter, it's not clear if the judge actually believes them or if he's just trying to intimidate Miriam into obeying the law.

CHAPTER 4: CHARLIE

When Miriam got out of jail, she was "no longer human." For a year and a half, she'd been verbally abused by guards, dragged by her hair, and forced to work in a sweatshop. Her days started at 4:30 am. She became so neurotic and paranoid during her time in jail that, years later, she would still become afraid when other people—even her own husband, Charlie—made sudden movements.

Miriam's time in jail is dehumanizing—she's treated as a mere object whose only purpose is to work in a factory, producing goods for the state. Miriam remains anxious and paranoid for decades to come, an apt example of how the legacy of East German tyranny is still a vivid reality for many.

Miriam was released from prison in 1970, shortly before her 18th birthday. She began dating her future husband, Charlie—whose real name was Karl-Heinz Weber—and shortly afterwards they got married. Charlie was an athletic coach. At the time, athletics were hugely important in East Germany—to the point where promising athletes were given growth hormones so that they could bring "glory to the nation." Charlie had been arrested on suspicion of trying to leave the country. Afterwards, he began writing for an underground satirical paper, and published a critique of the East German government that was published in West Germany.

It's probably inevitable that Miriam began dating another "subversive" after she was released from prison—it's unlikely that anybody with a completely clean record would have wanted to marry her, for fear of being menaced by the Stasi. From a liberal, Western perspective, Charlie is only exercising his freedom of speech when he criticizes the government; however, criticizing the government was considered a serious offense in East Germany in the 1970s.

The Webers were under a lot of suspicion due to Miriam's police record and Charlie's journalism. Miriam found it almost impossible to get a job—the Stasi ensured that she was rejected from everything. In 1979, Miriam's sister tried to sneak into Western Germany with Charlie's help—after she was caught, she was sent to jail and Charlie was put on probation. Later, Charlie and Miriam were imprisoned during the visit of the West German chancellor, as the police feared that "subversives" like the Webers would try to embarrass East Germany during this period. Then, later in 1980, Charlie was sent to jail again. In October, Miriam was informed that Charlie was dead.

Ultimately, Charlie is arrested for helping someone leave the state—an act that, like denouncing the government in print, wouldn't even be considered a crime in West Germany, just a few miles away from his home. Charlie's untimely death is a mystery that Miriam has been trying to solve for forty years—the timing would suggest foul play, as if the Stasi were trying to silence Charlie for fear that he'd continue to cause trouble for them.

East Germany was, at least on paper, a democracy—there were district attorneys, opposition parties, and a small amount of subversive journalism. But in reality, the Communist Party was all-powerful, and the press, the academy, and the legal system toed the party line on all issues. So when Miriam tried to find a lawyer to investigate her husband's death, she was told that Charlie had hanged himself, and couldn't find out anything else. She tried to talk to Charlie's former lawyer, who gave her conflicting accounts of how Charlie had hanged himself, and at one point told her, "Why don't you tell me what *you* know."

Miriam was faced with the Kafkaesque nightmare of an entire society that had been forbidden from discussing the facts of Charlie's death—whether she went to lawyers, Stasi officers, or government officials, she got the same confusing, clearly untrue story. Even more maddeningly, Miriam herself was gaslighted and made to feel unreasonable—here, the lawyer's question suggests that Miriam, not the East German state, is the unreliable one.

Later, the Stasi informed Miriam that Charlie's body was ready for burial. At the funeral parlor, a man told her the body would be cremated. When Miriam refused, he told her there was no way to bury the body, as there were no coffins. When Miriam claimed that she had her own coffin, the man told her that it would be impossible to display the body before the burial. Miriam promised to make "the kind of ruckus you have never seen" unless the man displayed the body. During the funeral, Miriam was allowed to see Charlie's corpse. His neck was unmarked, suggesting that he didn't hang himself. Stasi guards photographed everyone who attended the funeral. After the coffin was buried, Miriam began to doubt that it held a body.

The funeral proceedings confirmed what Miriam already knew: the government was hiding something about Charlie's death. Clearly, the authorities didn't want Miriam to view her husband's body, presumably because she'd see that he didn't have marks on his neck. It's interesting that, with a little complaining and prodding, Miriam was able to view Charlie's body at all. The East German state, while repressive, may not have been as tyrannical as other dictatorships. (And indeed, this kind of official obfuscation of police violence is still common even in more "liberal" societies today.)

Miriam applied to leave East Germany. This was uncommon, but not unheard of in the 1980s: East Germany had an incentive to get rid of subversives, most of whom were granted automatic citizenship when they reached West Berlin. She also applied to have her husband's coffin moved with her. Strangely, the Stasi phoned her to tell her, "There will be nothing left in the coffin. You won't be able to prove anything." Miriam interpreted this to mean that Charlie's body was never placed in the coffin.

In this passage, as in others, Funder contrasts the perceived power and professionalism of the Stasi with their sometimes-surprising incompetence. The Stasi here seem to have inadvertently signaled to Miriam that foul play was involved in Charlie's death. Considering the size and scope of the Stasi, it seems inevitable that internal confusion and discrepancies would be relatively common.

In May 1989, the Stasi summoned Miriam to their headquarters, with her identity papers. They informed her that she'd be placed on a train and deported to West Berlin. Confused, Miriam had no choice but to board the train. She had no idea that, only six months later, the Berlin Wall would fall, leading to the reunification of East and West Germany.

It's unclear, both to Miriam and to readers, why the Stasi finally gave in to Miriam's request to leave the country—whether it had anything to go with Miriam's persistent questioning of her husband's death, or whether it was symptomatic of a time when the East German state was weakening.

Back in 1996, Funder asks Miriam why she returned to Leipzig. Miriam explains that Leipzig is the best place from which to mount an investigation into Charlie's disappearance. She's trying to have Charlie's body exhumed so that she can learn how he really died; she doubts that he killed himself. The authorities have been looking into Charlie's death, but the investigation was suspended until the owner of the cemetery where Charlie was "buried" could confirm that something "untoward" happened. Miriam has spoken to various officials who were probably involved in Charlie's arrest, but none of them have given her information. From time to time, Miriam thinks about the Stasi headquarters—once a terrifying symbol of East German power, and now a museum. Sometimes she drives by the building and feels a sense of triumph.

Years after Charlie's death, Miriam is still invested in learning the truth about how he died—whether he hanged himself or the Stasi murdered him, and if so, why. Miriam is pleased with the collapse of the Stasi and the East German state, both of which caused her a lot of misery. And yet, as Funder portrays her here, Miriam is still desperate for closure. The death of Charlie was clearly a catastrophic event for Miriam—she loved and trusted her husband. Perhaps, by learning the truth about Charlie's death, Miriam will be able to come to terms with her troubled past.

CHAPTER 5: THE LINOLEUM PALACE

Funder returns to Berlin from Leipzig. When she enters her room, a voice shouts, "Don't be frightened." The voice belongs to Julia, the person from whom Funder rents the room. She explains that she's removing some bookshelves to take to her new place. Funder is too tired to talk to Julia, so she wishes Julia goodnight and goes to bed.

The chapter opens with a "fake scare," like in a horror movie—Funder thinks she's facing a burglar instead of her sub-letter. Perhaps this shows that Funder is jumpy and nervous after her interview with Miriam, and still imagining the paranoid world of a surveillance state.

The next morning, it's very cold—the heating has cut out. Funder surveys the room where she's staying. It's bare and ugly, and Julia repeatedly shows up to take the remaining items away. The apartment used to be beautiful, but during the Communist years it was converted into a small dormitory. She considers that the room contains all of life's necessities, but "not a single thing … of beauty or joy"—and in this sense, it's a lot like East Germany itself.

The apartment building in which Funder stays is itself a symbol of the ongoing legacy of the East German state. East Germany, it's often said, was responsible for making German culture colder and crueler—and in this sense, Funder's ugly, cold apartment is the perfect symbol of the East German ethos.

The Parliament building for the East German government was once the Palace of the Prussian Emperors. Now that the East German government is no more, there's a debate over what to do with the building. Nearby lies the neighborhood of Mitte, through which Funder now strolls. She thinks about Miriam and about the Stasi. She wonders what it must have been like to be a Stasi officer, and then suddenly be left without any authority. She puts an ad in the Potsdam paper, asking for former Stasi officers who'd be willing to talk to her, with anonymity guaranteed.

Just as the current German state has converted old East German buildings into new buildings (the Stasi HQ is now a museum, for example), the old East German state converted much older buildings into government offices. This is a common technique with the arrival of a new state—by appropriating and reshaping an old symbol of power, like a building, the new state asserts its own power.

CHAPTER 6: STASI HQ

Funder gets lots of responses to her ad in the paper: most of the responders are curious how much money they'll be paid for their insider account of the Stasi. One caller explains that it's almost impossible for a Stasi officer to get a job in the new German government. The caller claims to have been an IM—an unofficial collaborator with the Stasi, who reported on family and friends. Nevertheless, Funder isn't sure that she can offer any money.

Following the collapse of the state, the Stasi are desperate for money—nobody in Germany wants to hire a secret police officer. From Funder's perspective, however, this is good news—it means that she gets plenty of callers.

Funder describes the offices of a man named Erich Mielke, the Minister for State Security, whose name is still synonymous with the Stasi. Mielke kept tabs on thousands of Germans, and after the collapse of the government, Germans raided his offices in search of "their unauthorized biographies." Under Mielke, the Stasi became one of the most powerful surveillance forces in history. There were almost 100,000 Stasi employees, with an additional 173,000 full-time informers. Under Mielke, there was one Stasi agent or informant per sixty-three people. Counting part-time informers, it's been estimated that there was one informer per 6.5 citizens.

In between interviewing individual people, Funder writes about the overall history of East Germany, giving a sense for the scope of the surveillance state. According to Funder, a respectable portion of the total East German population was affiliated with the Stasi in some way, whether as an officer, an employee, or an informer. The Stasi was a huge, bureaucratic organization, with inner and outer circles, and many of its members probably also spied on each other.

Mielke was born in 1907, and as a young man he quickly rose through the Communist Party. During the Nazi years, he fled to Moscow, where he attended an elite training school for Communist officials. After World War Two, he returned to Berlin and worked for the Soviet police. Then, in 1957, he masterminded a coup against the Soviet leadership, and appointed himself Minister for State Security. In the seventies, he organized another coup that resulted in the appointment of Erich Honecker to Secretary-General of East Germany.

Mielke, like most of the leaders of East Germany until 1989, was militarily trained, and used his training to rise to power in 1957. He ran East Germany from behind the scenes—he didn't have very much ceremonial power, but he controlled the Stasi, the single biggest and most powerful part of the East German state apparatus.

"The two Erichs" ran East Germany for nearly two decades. Honecker was the "face" of East Berlin, and Mielke was in charge of surveillance. Honecker had also attended the Soviet training school, and worked against the Nazis throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Without the Stasi, Honecker could never have maintained his power over East Germany.

Honecker and Mielke were alike in a lot of ways: they were both trained militarily, they were both committed to Communist ideals, and they both believed in the value of a strong, authoritarian state that could control its people through force.

The Stasi headquarters is now full of tourists. Funder listens as a guide explains that demonstrators broke into the building—known as "the House of One Thousand Eyes"—in early 1990. By that time, Funder recalls from her own research, Honecker and Mielke were old men, yet still in excellent health. They spent most of their lives convinced that West Germany was the successor to the Nazi regime. But when Mikhail Gorbachev rose to power in the Soviet Union in 1985, he began liberalizing Russian society and cutting off ties with East Germany. Without Soviet aid, Honecker and Mielke had no way of fighting off demonstrators. By 1989, East Germany had become more Communist than the U.S.S.R. itself, as the government desperately tried and failed to stave off the liberalization of the Communist states.

It's a sign of the collapse of the East German state that the Stasi headquarters, once a symbol of government secrecy and impenetrability, is now a public place where thousands of people walk every day. The collapse of the Soviet Union prefigured the collapse of the East German state—without funding and support from Russia, the state became extremely weak, and populist demonstrators were inspired to rise up against their authoritarian leaders. Finally, notice the way the museum guide's narration of history blends with Funder's own knowledge of history.

By 1989, the East German demonstrators had become emboldened by news of the disintegrated Soviet state. In Hungary, demonstrators tore down the barrier between their country and East Germany, inviting in tens of thousands of East German citizens, many of whom continued into West Germany. Honecker tried to maintain control by incarcerating demonstrators in Berlin and Leipzig. However, there were so many demonstrators that the Stasi had no way of imprisoning them all. Stasi officers tried to use guns and tear gas on their people, but the demonstrations continued as strong as ever. Toward the end of 1989—the fortieth anniversary of the East German state—Honecker was forced to step down.

In spite of the vast size of the Stasi, they weren't powerful enough to defeat the massive number of demonstrators and revolutionaries. Over the decades, the East German state had become more and more authoritarian, to the point where many East Germans felt they had nothing further to lose, and chose to risk their lives by standing up to the Stasi. Put another way, the East German state may have failed because it used too many "sticks" and not enough "carrots."

As a last resort, Honecker's successor tried to relax travel restrictions between East and West Germany. Within hours of the announcement, East Germans had rushed to the **Berlin Wall** to cross into West Berlin. The next day, "people from east and west were climbing, crying, and dancing on the Wall."

The collapse of the Berlin Wall was an important symbol of the end of the Cold War: from hereon out, it was said, there would be peace and brotherhood in the world. But as Funder will show, and has shown already, the legacy of a divided Germany state is still very much alive.

CHAPTER 7: THE SMELL OF OLD MEN

In the weeks following the East German state's announcement to relax border restrictions, the Stasi headquarters was in chaos. Officers had been ordered to destroy any files that could incriminate the Stasi in criminal behavior. For days on end, Stasi employees burned or **shredded incriminating documents**. The guard, who has been describing the history of the fall of East Germany to tourists, falls silent.

The shredded surveillance documents are an important symbol of the legacy of the state, and the ongoing ethical challenges of dealing with this legacy. The fact that the Stasi were instructed to destroy these documents also signals that many in the East German government recognized that they were behaving immorally by monitoring innocent people. And again, notice how this was initially presented as the museum employee's account of history, even though Funder went on to amplify it with her own knowledge of the events. This is similar to the way flashbacks sometimes work in movies: a character describes his or her memories, which gradually become the movie itself.

After the fall of East Germany, Mielke was roundly criticized, and—along with Erich Honecker—accused of treason. Mielke was sent to various prisons, and Honecker was prosecuted for executions. He later fled to Chile, where he died of cancer. There was a vigorous debate in Germany over what should be done with the Stasi files—should they be used to prosecute the Stasi, or should they be burned, protecting citizens' right to privacy? In 1990, the newly elected parliament passed a law allowing surveilled citizens, and nobody else, to read their own files. Germany was the only country in the eastern bloc that "opened its files on its people to its people."

Mielke and Honecker were secretly despised in East Germany for many years—and after their state collapsed around them, they were prosecuted and punished for their decades of ethical and human rights violations. The shredded documents pose a moral challenge—by allowing individual people to read their own files, however, the new German government may have been trying to distinguish itself from its secretive, authoritarian predecessor. However, as Funder later shows, this is largely a symbolic gesture, since the shredded files are being reassembled at an extremely slow rate.

Alone with the tour guide in the museum, Funder tells the guide that she's trying to learn about people who confronted Stasi leadership. The guide tells Funder that she should speak to Frau Paul. The guide then leads Funder through the rooms of the Stasi HQ. In a room that used to be Mielke's person quarters, Funder finds a cleaning woman. The woman tells Funder that she lived under Mielke and, like most, "conformed" to the rules. The woman mutters that there's no unity in the new Germany—some people even want the **Wall** back. She draws Funder's attention to a smudge on the wall, where a Stasi officer must have rested his head while leaning back in his chair. No amount of cleaning will get rid of the smudge. The building, she adds, is still full of the smell of old men.

We won't meet Frau Paul until later in the book; however, the cleaning woman's observations about conforming are very important, since they suggest that most people in East Germany survived by compromising their values and cooperating with the corrupt Stasi. (Funder doesn't interview many such people, however—presumably, the people who compromised their values would be reluctant to speak to an Australian journalist). The smudge could be another symbol for the messy, dirty legacy of a troubled past.

CHAPTER 8: TELEPHONE CALLS

After going to the museum, Funder gets a call from Miriam, thanking her for talking to her. Funder suggests that they meet again; Miriam hesitates, but agrees. Funder understands what Miriam must be going through: Miriam has just confessed the most painful parts of her life to Funder, and probably isn't too eager to see her again. Later that night, Funder watches a German TV program about a Leipzig stripper who stripped for East German government officials. She falls into restless sleep. At 2:30 am, she gets a phone call from her friend Klaus. Klaus lives nearby, and he and Funder often go to the same pubs.

Miriam is obviously reluctant to talk any further with Funder, and seems to agree to speak with her again purely out of politeness. Funder, for her part, seems strangely drawn to Miriam: something about Miriam's story, and her ongoing quest for closure and truth, fascinates her. Notice the subtle way that Funder progressively becomes more and more of a "character" in her own book, rather than simply an impartial narrator.

The next morning, Funder wakes up to the sound of the phone ringing. She has another caller about her ad in the newspaper. The caller asks if Funder is really Australian, as she's claimed in her ad. Funder notes that many East Germans are curiously ignorant of other countries, since their travel was, of course, restricted. The caller promises to meet with Funder in Potsdam to "set the record straight." He says that his name is Herr Winz.

It's interesting that Herr Winz sees himself as setting the record straight; this might suggest that he believes there have been lots of lies and exaggerations of Stasi history. For obvious reasons, Stasi agents living in Germany in the 1990s are likely to take this sort of tone in interviews about their former employment.

Funder meets with Herr Winz, who suggests that they talk in a hotel café. There, Winz asks to see Funder's identification card, but Funder points out that Australia doesn't issue ID cards for all its citizens. Winz seems genuinely bemused. Funder shows Winz her passport, and he examines it very carefully. When Funder asks to see Winz's identification, he laughs. He proceeds to explain to Funder that he worked for the government from 1961 to 1990, focusing on counter-espionage. He presents Funder with a thesis he wrote on protecting East Germany from NATO infiltration. Winz explains that he wrote the thesis for the *Insiderkomitee*, a secret society of former Stasi officers whose main purpose, he claims, is to create "an objective view of history."

Winz seems to be so accustomed to asking to see other people's identification—and having other people comply fearfully—that he continues to do so long after he's lost all authority in his country. Many Stasi agents, Funder learns, are still in contact with one another—now, however, their main purpose isn't consolidating power or protecting the state, but simply controlling the way they're perceived by other people.

Funder proceeds to ask Herr Winz about his work for the Stasi, but he refuses to say much. He claims that the Stasi had "people everywhere," including spies in NATO and West Germany. When Funder asks how Winz is treated nowadays, he complains that he's slandered and accused of human rights violations. He criticizes German capitalism, which has polluted the planet and torn society apart. He gives Funder a copy of Karl Marx's *The Communist Manifesto* and leaves.

While some of the other Stasi agents with whom Funder speaks will claim that rumors of the Stasi's power have been greatly exaggerated, Winz assures Funder that the Stasi were, in fact, hugely powerful. Notably, Winz criticizes the onslaught of contemporary capitalism—for years, he's been trained to believe that capitalism is the enemy and Communism is the solution, and the collapse of the USSR doesn't seem to have changed that view. Whether Funder has any sympathy for this perspective is unclear.

Funder calls Miriam a second time and leaves a message, suggesting that they speak further. She receives many more calls from old Stasi officers interested in speaking to her. She's eager to ask Miriam more questions, but senses that perhaps Miriam has been "hounded enough."

Funder continues to contact Miriam in vain—something about Miriam's story has touched a nerve in her. Yet Funder has to confront the ethics of her own behavior: maybe she should leave Miriam alone and, unlike the Stasi, give her a measure of privacy.

CHAPTER 9: JULIA HAS NO STORY

In the evening, Funder walks through the park. She notices "drunks and punks" smoking and drinking in the grass. Back at home, she finds her door unlocked—Julia is there again, this time retrieving some old love letters. Funder asks Julia about homeless people in the park, and Julia explains that there were no homeless people before the fall of the **Berlin Wall**. She tells Funder than men look at Funder because she's clearly foreign—apparently, she's too pale to be German. Julia also mentions that she had an Italian boyfriend—something that Funder finds remarkable. Noticing that Julia is more talkative than usual, Funder asks her to stay for dinner, and Julia agrees.

Funder's walk through the park suggests that, even after reunification, Germany is far from perfect—there are still criminals, homeless people, etc. Julia's claim that there were no homeless people in East Germany isn't just propaganda: the Communist regime made a point of allocating resources for the homeless, something that most capitalist societies don't do. This complicates the narrative of East Germany as a wholly repressive and terrible state, though its positive aspects certainly don't cancel out its human rights violations.

Julia Behrend and Funder are the same age, which means that Julia was 23 when the **Berlin Wall** came down. She's currently studying Eastern European languages at Humboldt University. Her parents, Irene and Dieter, were teachers, and fairly suspicious of their country. As a result, Julia grew up skeptical of the East German government, yet she was never jailed for her beliefs. Dieter joined the Communist Party, but often spoke out against what he saw as its unfair methods. Dieter was also unwilling to adopt the standard party line about how East Germans weren't in any way responsible for the Holocaust.

Julia grew up in a family of people who were unusually open in their opposition to the East German government, and her parent's behavior was critical in inspiring her to speak out against her government. At times, it may seem unusual that Funder would speak with so many dissidents and subversives—where are the ordinary German people who went along with the state? But Funder's book is focused on the former group of people—and, further, it was probably harder for her to find people of the latter type who'd be willing to speak to a stranger.

Julia excelled at languages as a young girl, and won prizes for translating Russian. Growing up, she dreamed of becoming a translator. As she opens up to Funder, Funder begins to get an idea of what Julia's life in East Germany has been like.

By learning about Julia's individual experiences, Funder begins to get a vivid sense for what life was life in East Germany—and this, of course, is exactly what Funder wants readers to experience, too.

CHAPTER 10: THE ITALIAN BOYFRIEND

At the age of the sixteen, Julia worked as an usher at the annual Leipzig Fair. There, she met her Italian boyfriend, a much older man who worked for an Italian computer company. For two years, they had a long-distance relationship, but occasionally visited one another in Hungary. When Julia's boyfriend visited her in Germany, they were surveilled—police officers would tail them, terrifying the boyfriend. Julia's phone lines were also certainly tapped.

East Germany was such an insular society that it was automatically suspicious when any of its citizens became romantically involved with foreigners—even in the case of Julia, a teenager girl who seemed to have no real plans to undermine the state's authority. It's a sign of the Stasi's size that it had the resources to monitor relatively low-risk people like Julia.

As a teenager, Julia was mandatorily sent to boarding school; the authorities never offered an explanation. At school, she and her classmates were forced to watch state-sponsored news programs, as well as a program called *Der Schwarz Kanal*, in which the presenters attacked Western media. One day in 1984, the boarding school headmaster met with Julia's parents and begged them to convince Julia to break up with her boyfriend. The state, Julia tells Funder, must have assumed she was planning to leave East Germany.

Julia's story would suggest that she was moved to another school so that the Stasi could monitor her and influence her behavior more easily (perhaps the headmaster was a Stasi collaborator).

Julia graduated from school with superb grades, and applied to become a state translator. However, she failed the translation exam—not because she was bad at languages, but because she flunked the "political exam," in which she was asked questions about the East German government and had to recite the standard "socialist catechism." Some of Dieter's friends privately told Dieter that Julia would never be allowed to become a translator. Instead, Julia applied to become a receptionist at a hotel; although the interview went perfectly, she was never hired.

The East German state wanted its translators to be politically loyal, not just to excel at languages As a result, an extremely talented student like Julia was unable to get a good job. Furthermore, it's strongly implied that the Stasi, suspicious of her relationship with her Italian boyfriend, rigged her exam and job interviews to ensure that she wouldn't be able to find work.

Desperate for work, Julia went to the East German "Employment Office." Julia explained that she needed work because she was unemployed, at which point the office officials told there, "There *is* no unemployment in the German Democratic Republic." Julia realized that she would have to marry her Italian boyfriend and leave. But when she met him in Hungary, she broke up with him.

By the time she was in her late teens, Julia had hit against the limits of East German society: because of something as trivial as who she was dating, she was unable to find work and, furthermore, she was unable to find anyone who would listen to her problem—since, by definition, it conflicted with the usual "party line" about how perfect East German society was.

CHAPTER 11: MAJOR N.

After Julia broke up with her boyfriend, she returned to East Germany. She was the summoned to the police, supposedly to have her ID renewed. But when she visited the police, she was sent to a private room to speak with a man known only as "Major N., Minister of State Security."

As Funder presents it, this passage is almost comical—the sudden, bathetic contrast between the triviality of a teen breakup and the seriousness of a Stasi interview. But Julia wasn't laughing at the time, of course.

Major N. showed Julia copies of the letters she'd sent her Italian boyfriend, which he proceeded to read aloud. He humiliated her by forcing her to explain every inside joke in the letters. Then he read a long report about the Italian boyfriend, right down to the kind of car he drove. He concluded, "We are interested in your friend," and added that she would be called back later "for a chat." Julia explained that she'd just broken up with her boyfriend, and never wanted to see him again. Major N. gave Julia his card and invited her to "reconsider," emphasizing that Julia must not repeat their conversation to anyone. As Julia tells all of this to Funder in 1996, her voice is slow and low—she admits, "I think I'd totally repressed that entire episode."

Major N. seems to have been trying to intimidate Julia, bullying her by reading the letters out loud. Or perhaps there was no method to Major N.'s madness, and he just wanted to exploit his power over a defenseless younger person. It's unclear why the Stasi were so eager to learn about Julia's Italian boyfriend—he might have actually had a history of "subversion," or the Stasi might have just been unusually thorough in this case. It's not specified what Major N. means by "reconsider," but he clearly wants Julia to cooperate with him in some way, in order to give the Stasi more information about the Italian boyfriend. Notice that Julia brings up the concept of repression, a common reaction among people who've endured traumatic experiences. Instead of reliving their trauma again and again, many people unconsciously repress the past and forget about it altogether—until it usually resurfaces eventually, sometimes even decades later.

Back at home, Julia had to decide whether or not to inform on her Italian boyfriend. She decided that she wouldn't, which left her only one option: marry someone else who lived outside the country. She told her parents about her conversation with Major N., disobeying Major. N's command. Her parents urged her, a little naively, to write directly to Erich Honecker. The next day, Julia nervously called Major N. and said that she'd told her family about their conversation, and that she intended to write directly to Erich Honecker. Major N., furious, warned Julia that she and her family would be severely punished if she tried to contact Honecker. A week later, Major N. and his superior came to visit the Behrend family. To everyone's surprise, Major N. tried to convince Julia not to contact Honecker, insisting that they could solve her problem. The very next week, Julia got a call about a job as a receptionist.

Desperate, and with very little left to lose, Julia broke Major N.'s commandments and stood up to Major N., effectively calling his bluff. Clearly, the tactic worked—since, not coincidentally, Julia found work soon after. Perhaps Major N. was concerned about losing his own job, suggesting that even Stasi employees weren't safe from punishment. This also somewhat echoes Miriam's experience being tortured—it's suggested that some of these abusive Stasi authorities were actually breaking the law, and could have been punished if their actions were made known to their higher-ups.

Julia finishes her story and bids Funder goodnight. As Funder sees Julia out, she wonders how this woman, who seems so timid, found the courage to call the Stasi on their bluff. Funder has a feeling that "there is something missing here," something which Julia "can't leave, but can't look at either."

It's unclear what Funder means by "something missing." She seems to sense that Julia isn't telling her something important about her past—and indeed, Julia will reveal more of her secrets later on in the book. Or, more generally, it could mean that Funder will never fully understand Julia's experiences, and the pain and uncertainty with which she's had to live.

CHAPTER 12: THE LIPSI

At work, Funder reads hate mail from a German TV viewer, who explains that Germany will never forget "what you nazis done." Uwe arrives and offers her a ride home. When Funder brings up the hate mail, Uwe nods and explains, "We usually respond to those in a moderate tone." Privately, Funder thinks about the German society that supported Hitler—the disturbing truth is that, even after World War Two, a lot of people might have voted for Hitler a second time.

After the fall of Hitler in 1945, many Nazis survived under the new Communist regime. Furthermore, the government claimed that there had never been Nazis in East Germany (although, of course, there had been). Partly a result of the East German government's policy of denial, Germans in the 21st century are still struggling to come to terms with the Nazi legacy. Certain Nazis or Nazi collaborators have gone unpunished, and state authorities have only recently begun to acknowledge the Holocaust.

In the car ride home, Funder tells Uwe about the ad she placed in the paper, and about the stories Julia has told her. Uwe tells Funder about a man named Hagen Koch, who the TV station interviewed recently. Uwe also mentions a man named Karl-Eduard von Schnitzler, the chief propagandist for East Germany, who Funder might speak with.

As Uwe implies, Funder's two interviewees can be placed in conversation with one another: von Schnitzler was a powerful propagandist, while Koch, as Funder will learn, is living proof that East German propaganda was a lie.

In the following days Funder familiarizes herself with von Schnitzler's TV program, "The Black Channel," first broadcast in 1960. In the years leading up to the fall of the **Berlin Wall**, von Schnitzler was much despised: one of his main jobs was providing live commentary for old German movies when the West German TV station broadcasted them. East Germans secretly thought of him as a "grumpy old puppet."

It's interesting that East Germany allowed West German television to air instead of banning it altogether. Perhaps the government believed that it could subvert Western TV by mocking it—but instead, many East Germans just came to despise von Schnitzler.

Funder visits the former East German television station, now a "multimedia center." Inside, she speaks with a woman named Frau Anderson, who tells her that von Schnitzler, unlike many former government officials, has stuck to his old message, rather than becoming a "damn turncoat." Anderson shows Funder some tapes of von Schnitzler's earlier TV programs from 1960: therein, he announces that he will be providing "a hygiene operation" for West German broadcasting. Later, in 1965, von Schnitzler announces that the building of the **Berlin Wall** is a "humane" act that will guard East Germany from invaders. In another tape, von Schnitzler introduces a group of "Lipsi dancers," who were designed to compete with Western entertainment, such as rock 'n' roll. The dancers are stiff, un-sexy, and oddly clumsy.

Von Schnitzler, as much as any single person, was responsible for spouting lies on behalf of the East German government. Like some of the history Funder discusses, the Lipsi dancers seem almost funny in retrospect, since they represent East Germany's attempts to compete with American and West German entertainment—and these attempts failed, of course, because entertainment designed for consumers' desires will always be more entertaining than entertainment designed for the sake of state propaganda. At the time, however, the dances stood for the domineering, humorless nature of the East German government.

Weeks after Funder's visit, she gets a call from Herr Winz, connecting her to von Schnitzler's wife, who in turn gives Funder von Schnitzler's address.

Von Schnitzler seems willing to cooperate with Funder—and as we'll see, he has a certain defiance that makes him want to tell his side of the story.

CHAPTER 13: VON SCHNI-

Funder arrives at the von Schnitzler home. Frau Marta von Schnitzler, a former actress, lets her inside and introduces her to an elderly man—Herr von Schnitzler, once secretly known by his nickname, "Filthy Ed." Funder sits down with von Schnitzler to ask him questions, and von Schnitzler is eager to cooperate, claiming that most of what's said about him is utterly false.

Von Schnitzler claims to feel that he's been slandered in recent years; therefore, his motive for talking to Funder is to correct the public's misperceptions.

Von Schnitzler was born in 1918 in Berlin; his father was an important administrator for the Emperor. Under the Nazis, von Schnitzler's family remained powerful. However, von Schnitzler became enamored with Communism. He fought with the Nazis, but was captured by the British, who forced him to make propaganda broadcasts for the Allied cause. He continued doing so even after the war. In 1947, however, he was hired to run the propaganda division of the new Communist state in Germany.

Von Schnitzler was a rarity in East Germany: a member of a prominent Nazi family who managed to make the transition from Hitler's Reich to the Communist East German state. However, Funder has already suggested that many Nazis and Nazi supporters survived under the East German state, even if they weren't given government positions.

Von Schnitzler's career in East Germany revolved around his ability to provide commentary for West German television. Angrily, he tells Funder that recent German television is "trash." He also mentions "that big television tyrant" who runs so much of Western media—Funder realizes that he's talking about Rupert Murdoch. Funder asks von Schnitzler if he still believes—as he claimed in the 1960s—that the **Berlin Wall** was a humane, life-preserving thing. Furiously, von Schnitzler shouts that he still believes this, because the Wall halted the progress of Western imperialism.

As with Herr Winz in the earlier chapter, von Schnitzler criticizes the contemporary German state and the capitalist ideology that it represents. He even points out that countries with supposedly free presses, such as Australia and the U.S., have media systems that are owned by the same people (such as the Murdoch family, which still owns a huge chunk of American media, including Fox and The Wall Street Journal). While there may be some truth to these points, Funder doesn't offer any thoughts, so it's not clear how sympathetic she is to von Schnitzler's argument.

Funder asks von Schnitzler if the East German state could have done anything better. Von Schnitzler admits that, early on, it was obvious to him that the state was going to be economically weak. Therefore, he made a point not to involve himself in "success propaganda," such as exaggerating harvest results. He also insists that the size of the East German surveillance apparatus has been greatly exaggerated, perhaps by as much as ninety percent. Abruptly, he then mutters, "This … conversation … is … now … over!"

Von Schnitzler is using a coping mechanism often seen in soldiers, fascists, and criminals: he acknowledges that he did something wrong (he made propaganda), but insists that he wasn't as bad as some other people (the people who exaggerated harvest results). At the end of their conversation, Funder seems to crack under the pressure of the cognitive dissonance in his brain: he claims he did nothing wrong, and yet he's hated by millions.

Before she goes, Funder offers von Schnitzler a gift, a small pin showing the Australian and German flags crossed together. Von Schnitzler notices that the German flag is the Federal Republic's, not East Germany's. Nevertheless, he places the pin next to his bust of Karl Marx.

Even von Schnitzler exhibits a tacit acceptance for the new German order when he takes Funder's flag pin. Von Schnitzler himself is becoming a relic of the vanished era of Communism in Germany.

CHAPTER 14: THE WORSE YOU FEEL

Funder has lunch with Julia. They eat a big meal and drink beers. Suddenly, Julia tells Funder something: just after the fall of the **Berlin Wall**, she was raped.

Earlier Funder alluded to a "mystery" in Julia's behavior—perhaps this horrific rape was the thing Funder sensed in Julia's past.

After the **Wall** fell, Julia explains, she attended a wedding. That night, she met a man in her building elevator. The man stopped the elevator, hit Julia in the head, and threatened to kill her if she called for help. After the rape, he ran out of the elevator. Julia was shaken, but she found the courage to go to the police the next day. The police were cold, and Julia sensed that they didn't believe her. However, they later caught the man, a serial rapist. In trial, Julia testified against him, which made her feel "violated all over again." Perhaps worst of all, the new German state pardoned many criminals who were arrested at the time, so it's possible that her rapist was released.

Julia is raped just after the fall of the Berlin Wall, at a time when many people were feeling elated and excited for the future. Instead of sharing in the collective joy, Julia got a horrific, painful reminder that her life in the new German state wouldn't necessarily be any better than what had come before. And, maddeningly, the formation of a new German state was in some ways bad news for Julia, since it may have led to her rapist's release from jail.

After listening to Julia's story, Funder calls up Klaus and gets drunk with him. She wakes up the next day with a hangover. In the afternoon she goes for a swim in the community pool, only to realize that people use it as a bath—and, in fact, swimming "isn't allowed" today. Funder surveys the chaos in the pool, and realizes that it's actually a kind of "orderly chaos," with everyone obeying the rule against swimming. She thinks about order in other parts of German life—for example, "handicapped" people are often required to wear yellow armbands, something that initially shocked her. Fed up with "too many rules," she leaves the pool.

Funder seems to find Julia's story almost too painful to bear: it undercuts the usual heroic, transcendent narratives about the rise of a new German state that she's heard. The chapter ends with the disturbing suggestion that, deep down, little has changed in Germany: the people have been conditioned to obey rules, and that isn't going to change under the new state. Funder even implies that the legacy of the Holocaust is still present in German society—the "yellow armbands" allude to the classification marks that Jews and other "undesirables" had to wear under the Nazis.

CHAPTER 15: HERR CHRISTIAN

A few days later, Funder meets her next "Stasi man," Herr Christian, who's in his mid-forties. Christian takes Funder to a large house where he used to work, recording and coding transcripts of citizens' phone conversations. Christian began working for the Stasi at the age of 19, guarding their main nuclear bunker. Nowadays, he works as a private detective, doing most of the same things he did for the Stasi.

Herr Christian has adjusted to his new German life more successfully than some of his Stasi peers. He now lends his services to private customers, instead of the state.

Christian tells Funder that during his time with the Stasi, he was involved in an affair with his son's teacher. After he told his best friend the truth, the friend told the Stasi, and Christian was locked up for three days and demoted—not for the affair itself but for hiding something from his employers. Later on, Christian's job was to track down cars obtained by potential defectors. He brought hundreds of defectors to the Stasi; usually they received a year or two in jail.

Like many corrupt organizations, the Stasi maintained its own system of values, in which the gravest sin was being disloyal to the Stasi itself.

Christian tells Funder that one of his favorite things about his old job was that he got to wear disguises. His favorite disguise was a blind man. "Being a blind man," he claims, "is the best way to observe people."

Christian's ironic observation could be taken symbolically to mean that, while the Stasi had almost unlimited tools for observing other people, they were, and are, "blind" to their own mistakes and weaknesses.

CHAPTER 16: SOCIALIST MAN

In 1961, Hagen Koch painted a line in the streets of Berlin, marking the future location of the **Berlin Wall**. Funder visits Koch in his apartment, which Koch jokingly calls the "Wall Archive," since it's full of old documents about the Wall. He shows Funder Stasi maps, showing secret Stasi locations throughout Berlin, and then sits down to tell her about his life.

Koch keeps his own private museum of information about the Wall. This is somewhat odd since, as we'll see, he has strong objections to the East German state. The Wall itself, however, is an important part of his life for better or worse.

Koch talks about growing up in East Germany. For as long as he can remember, he was surrounded by German propaganda, and when he did well in school, his teachers could think of no higher compliment than to suggest he work for the Stasi. Love for the East German state, Funder realizes, was for all intents and purposes a religion—and like any religion, it had its own versions of heaven and hell and its own system of punishment and redemption. In German schools, teachers explained how history consisted of an evolution from chaos to Communist perfection.

Paradoxically, the Communist state of East Germany was extremely religious, despite the fact that it had banned almost all religion—the official "religion" of East Germany was Marxism itself, bolstered by a pseudoscientific theory of the historical dialectic.

Hagen Koch's father, Heinz Koch, was born in Saxony in 1912, an illegitimate child and therefore a social outcast in German society of the time. He signed up for the military in 1929, and later fought for the Nazis in France. Peculiarly, Koch tells Funder that the Soviet state gave his father permission to ride a bike in 1945, suggesting that they'd vetted his father's record and concluded "he wasn't an evil person." Funder senses that there's a lot Koch isn't telling her about his father.

Like many of Funder's interviewees, Koch appears to be hiding something unsavory about his past or his family. The fact that Koch seems to go out of his way to emphasize that his father wasn't *evil would strongly suggest that Heinz Koch did something that Funder would find contemptible.*

After the end of World War Two, Germany was divided between the Allied powers and the Soviet Union. In the West, the Allies prosecuted former Nazis and established democracy; in the East, the Soviets established a one-party system and stripped Germany of its factories. The "party line" on Nazism was that East German had never had Nazis—that was strictly a West German problem. Hagen Koch's own father became a Socialist schoolteacher. At the time, there were many in the West who believed that Russia was creating a Socialist paradise in Germany.

One reason that fascism may still survive in German culture, as Funder has suggested in the previous two chapters, is that East Germany never came to terms with its own history—it simply denied that it was ever run by Nazis. East Germany in the late 1940s was a lot like Germany in the 1990s: many people wanted to believe that the new society would blossom into a "paradise."

Heinz Koch ran for mayor in his small town, representing a moderate, non-Communist party, and won in a landslide. However, the Communist candidate was also the head of the voting commission, and declared himself the winner. Heinz was sentenced to work in a POW camp for seven years. A month later, his opponent, now the mayor, offered to get him out of prison, on the condition that he join the Communist Party. Heinz agreed, and he returned to teaching school.

Heinz was sentenced to prison, it's implied, simply because he'd defeated his opponent in the election. Then his opponent pressured him into accepting the terms of the election, on the condition that he (Heinz) be released from jail. This is a good example of how East Germany had the trappings of democracy (like elections), but no real substance behind them.

In 1948, the Soviet Union tried to starve out West Berlin by cutting off the power. In response, the Allies sent troops and supplies to West Berlin. A rumor began to circulate in East Berlin that the American military was dropping beetles on East German crops, creating mass starvation. When Funder asks how anybody could believe such an absurd allegation, Hagen Koch points out that Americans bombed Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and Dresden.

For many Americans, it might seem absurd to think that America could be seen as an imperialist menace. But of course, America was responsible for destroying huge cities during World War Two, and for starting wars and installing regimes in foreign countries even to the present day. While the idea of America as an "evil empire" is rejected by most Westerners, during the Cold War it was a central aspect of Communist ideology.

CHAPTER 17: DRAWING THE LINE

Hagen Koch continues his story for Funder. In 1960, he became a Stasi soldier. Because Heinz had been a mayoral candidate and was now cooperating with the Communist regime, however, Mielke arranged for Koch to become a technical draftsman instead of risking his life. Koch fell in love with a young woman, but the Stasi didn't approve, and urged him to ignore her. However, Koch chose to elope with the woman in 1961, the same year that the **Berlin Wall** was completed. By August, the East German army had begun building the Wall, separating friends and families. Koch was involved in plotting the Wall's location. Funder asks him why he didn't run to West Berlin while he had a chance, and Koch smiles—"I was in love! I'd been married three weeks."

Hagen was granted special privileges because of his father's relationship with the local politicians; however, his privileges came with lots of string attached—Hagen couldn't even marry the woman he loved without angering the Stasi authorities. Hagen chose to live in Communist East Germany because of personal ties—a rationale that many other East Germans probably shared.

In 1966, Heinz met his biological father. Shortly afterwards, Hagen Koch came to realize how much his father despised the Communist regime. He resigned from the Stasi, and was promptly thrown in jail, supposedly for circulating "pornographic material" (in actuality, a decidedly non-pornographic booklet celebrating a friend's wedding). While Koch was in jail, the Stasi confronted his wife and pressured her into signing a divorce application, threatening to take away her children otherwise. Then the Stasi showed Koch the divorce papers and pressured him to rejoin their ranks.

As Hagen grew up, he came to understand the corruption of the East German state. The state was so controlling that it promptly threw him in jail after he quit the Stasi and virtually forced his wife to divorce him—seemingly for no other reason than to enforce the message that people who "betrayed" the Stasi would be severely punished.

Confused and furious, Hagen Koch agreed to rejoin the Stasi. The divorce was canceled, but Koch was furious with his wife for "betraying" him, and divorced her anyway. Then, a year later, they remarried. The Stasi punished Koch for his "inconstancy."

Tragically, the Stasi's manipulations really did have an impact on Koch's marriage—because of them, he questioned whether or not he could trust his wife. In a bitter irony, the Stasi punished Koch for inconstancy when, in fact, this inconstancy was the Stasi's own fault.

CHAPTER 18: THE PLATE

In 1985, Hagen Koch continues, Heinz died. Koch was banned from the funeral, and he became so furious that he resigned from the Stasi again. He was then transferred into the regular East German army. Before he left the Stasi, Koch took a tiny souvenir—a little **plastic plate** his unit had won for its "cultural work." Three weeks after he left, he got a call from the Stasi, accusing him of stealing the plate. Later, he got a call from the District Attorney, demanding the plate's return. However, Koch was never prosecuted for his theft.

Koch stole the plastic plate not because it was inherently valuable—either to him or to anyone else—but because it took on a greater significance after he stole it. The plate represented his defiance and independence, and his refusal to go along with the Stasi's commands (even if his act of rebellion against them was comically tiny).

In 1993, Hagen Koch was interviewed for German television, and the interviewer, noticing the distracting glare from the **plate** on the wall, asked Koch to remove it. Koch fiercely refused. A couple days after the interview aired, German soldiers showed up at Koch's apartment, demanding the plate's return. Koch refused to allow the soldiers inside, and a few days later, he was charged with theft. Then, unexpectedly, the allegations were withdrawn—they were outside the statute of limitations. However, Koch was now charged with perjury, since he'd formally claimed not to know where the plate was. Koch was never tried, but his wife lost her job. However, Koch tells Funder, "All the courage I had is in that plate."

Evidently, Stasi soldiers noticed the plate in the background of Koch's TV interview (and it's even possible that Koch left the plate up in order to mock any Stasi viewers). As time went on, Koch's theft of the plate became a test of his resolve as well as a symbol of his defiance. Even though it would have been easy for him to return the small, worthless plate, doing so would have signaled Hagen's surrender to the state's authority. Hagen's behavior suggests the ways that Germans found tiny, symbolically loaded ways to rebel against the Stasi.

Shortly after this interview, Funder calls Miriam and leaves a message to ask if they can talk more. She goes to the station where, years ago, Miriam almost made it into West Germany. Where the **Wall** used to stand there's now a stretch of grass. Funder walks along the grass, remembering what Miriam told her about avoiding the dog and cutting herself on barbed wire.

The East German state is no more—even the Berlin Wall, the main symbol of East German might, is rubble. And yet the memory of those forty years lives on in Miriam and, now, in Funder and her readers.

CHAPTER 19: KLAUS

In the afternoon, Funder calls Klaus and asks to come over. By 6 pm, the two friends are on their third beer. Klaus Jentzsch, Funder thinks, is a familiar figure for many East Germans—the "bad boy of East German rock'n'roll." He began playing American music, such as Chuck Berry, and later did covers of the Beatles and Led Zeppelin. Many of the records were banned. However, Klaus's band also performed its own music, often for crowds of tens of thousands.

Klaus Jentzsch was a troublesome figure for the East Germans: he was extremely popular with the public, but he represented Western capitalist culture. In short, he was living proof of the West's superiority to the East, at least regarding entertainment and art, which never conform well to authoritarian standards.

For decades, East German musicians needed a license to perform music. In the 1970s, Klaus's band's license expired, and when they tried to renew it, they were told that they'd insulted the working classes of Berlin too many times. Later on, Klaus was allowed to read the Stasi's file on him, and in it he discovered that the government hated his profanity and heavy drinking. At the licensing hearing, Klaus was told, "you no longer exist." His music was no longer played or sold in stores. For years, Klaus worked in West Berlin as a "sound-man in the theater." After the fall of the **Berlin Wall**, though, he discovered that his band had become a cult phenomenon in East Germany.

While Klaus doesn't say so explicitly, it's strongly implied that his license wasn't renewed because the East German state resented his performances of British and American songs—these songs were, by their very nature, symbols of defiance and rebellion. But, like many musicians who were banned in East Germany (Frank Zappa and David Bowie are other examples), Klaus eventually became a cult figure.

Several members of Klaus's band died of a mysterious form of cancer, as did several other dissidents and critics of the state. Later, it was revealed that the Stasi used irradiated pins, tags, and pellets to trace dissidents and, it's entirely possible, to slowly murder them. When Funder asks Klaus about this atrocity, he just says, "I think the Stasi people have been punished enough." Later that night, Klaus sings a sad, beautiful song about "the walls of Cell 307 in Hohenschönhausen." Back in her apartment, Funder imagines Klaus "in his room, singing himself happy."

This passage contains what is potentially some of the most horrifying information in the whole book: the Stasi deliberately poisoned musicians for daring to play certain pieces of music. Yet after this shocking revelation, the chapter ends with the beautiful, transcendent image of Klaus, alone but happy, overcoming his sadness and loss through the power of music.

CHAPTER 20: HERR BOCK OF GOLM

Funder gets another phone call about her ad in the paper, this time from a man named Herr Bock. He says that he worked as a professor at the training academy of the Ministry of State Security, where he specialized in "spezialdisziplin," the art of recruiting informers.

Bock, as a professor for the Stasi, promises to offer a more refined or theoretical take on Stasi operations.

Funder meets with Herr Bock in his home. Bock immediately tells Funder that she's not allowed to use his real name, and Funder agrees to this condition. Bock then explains that the Stasi were divided into different departments, each with its own informant network. One such department was the church—by the eighties, Bock claims, more than half of all church leaders were Stasi informers.

"Bock," evidently, is a false name. He maintains a higher degree of secrecy than some of his peers, suggesting that he was privy to a greater amount of confidential information—for example, the fact that half of church leaders were informers. (Actually, the notion of using priests as informants isn't unique to Berlin—in France under the Nazis, for example, priests sometimes leaked people's confessional statements.)

Bock also tells Funder about Stasi training methods. There was a rigid process for recruiting informers: deciding what institutions the Stasi needed to monitor, what kind of person would be most likely to inform, what personal information would be most useful in pressuring people to inform, etc. Bock also showed Stasi trainees how to tap phones and tail suspects. The Stasi generally tried to use informers who were calm and stable. Informers weren't paid well, however, and many weren't paid at all. Herr Bock now works as a business adviser, showing West German companies how to negotiate with their East German counterparts—or, as Funder thinks, "getting the trust of his people and selling them cheap."

The fact that informers weren't paid well suggests that most acted out of fear or anxiety (or because they were being blackmailed with secrets of their own) rather than a desire for any material reward. Funder doesn't usually betray her emotions, but it's clear that she finds Herr Bock to be a generally despicable person. More than the other Stasi officers in the book, Bock is a "hired gun," without any particular allegiance to the ideologies of either capitalism or Communism—he just sells his services to the highest bidder (which is, ironically, a fundamentally capitalist mindset).

Funder calls a taxi from Bock's home, and, since it's dark outside, waits for the taxi inside. Bock, sensing that he has Funder at his mercy, turns off all the lights, claiming, "This way we can see the taxi come." Funder becomes very uncomfortable and wonders if Bock might try to assault her. However, the cab comes quickly, and she leaves the house.

Bock is still a manipulative, bullying man: he doesn't have the power of the Stasi behind him any more, and he doesn't harm Funder in any physical way here, but he nevertheless seems to be enjoying the power he holds over her.

CHAPTER 21: FRAU PAUL

Funder next goes to speak with Frau Paul, the woman whom the guide at the Stasi museum mentioned. Frau Paul turns out to be a woman in her early sixties. Over lunch, she tells Funder about her life in East Germany.

Funder first mentioned Frau Paul much earlier in the book, suggesting that she's a particularly important interviewee—even the museum guide knew that she had defied the Stasi.

Frau Paul gave birth to a child in early 1961, a boy named Torsten. The birth was difficult, and Torsten had many health problems as a baby. In August, the **Berlin Wall** went up, and that same day Frau Paul learned that she no longer had access to the West German medicines that she'd been using to take care of her child. East German doctors managed to move the baby across the Wall just as it was being completed—this probably saved the baby's life. Frau Paul was allowed to cross into West Berlin to attend her child's christening, but her husband was not.

As sad as it was, Frau Paul's situation wasn't uncommon in 1961: the Berlin Wall tore apart families and entire communities. It's a mark of West Berlin's medical and technological superiority to East Berlin that Torsten was sent to a West Berlin hospital (and, in fact, West Berlin's clear economic superiority was part of the reason the East German government built the Wall in the first place.)

As time went on, Torsten remained in the hospital and his condition continued to deteriorate. Frau Paul and her husband decided to move to West Berlin, where they'd be able to get better healthcare and be with their child. However, their request to move was denied. Frau Paul and her husband then met a man named Dr. Hinze, who was trying to find a way to send his son Michael into West Berlin.

After the building of the Wall, there were many who tried to cross into West Berlin in order to be with their friends and families and, furthermore, to enjoy a better quality of life. In light of this, von Schnitzler's claim that the Berlin Wall was designed to "protect" East Germany seems particularly absurd.

After interviewing Frau Paul, Funder spoke to Michael Hinze about his experiences. He explained how, in 1961, his parents put him in contact with a group of ten students. At the time, East Germans with West German passports were allowed to pass into West Berlin as long as they bought a ticket to Denmark or Sweden—so Michael just bought the ticket and got off in East Berlin. Michael was able to forge a West German passport and escape into West Berlin.

Even in the first year of the Berlin Wall, a large black market of forged passports and shady business deals arose, suggesting that there were lots of people who wanted to cross into West Germany. Notice the intricate, almost cinematic way that Funder intercuts her interview with Frau Paul and her interview with Michael Hinze.

Funder resumes describing her interview with Frau Paul. Frau Paul and her husband tried to do exactly what Michael Hinze had done: forge West German passports and leave East Berlin. They joined forces with a man named Werner Coch, and some students. Coch "elaborates" on Frau Paul's memories, explaining that he'd obtained a forged West German passport. On the day he and Frau Paul were scheduled to leave, however, he got word from the students that it wasn't safe to leave, because the Stasi were cracking down on forged passports. Frau Paul and her husband burned their forged passports.

Crossing into West Germany on a forged passport was a risky gamble, because, if you were caught, the Stasi would have concrete proof that you'd broken the law. Unfortunately, Frau Paul has no choice but to destroy her forged passport. Funder presents her two interviews (one with Paul, one with Coch) almost as if Coch and Paul are speaking to one another, when in reality Funder speaks to Frau Paul, and later to Coch.

Funder again resumes describing her interview with Frau Paul. In February 1963, the students asked Frau Paul if they could stay in her apartment for a few days. There had been a secret tunnel between West and East Berlin, but the tunnel had collapsed—now, the students were trying to escape in a different way.

Even after their first attempt to cross into West Berlin was thwarted, the students tried another way, suggesting the urgency of their desire to leave East Germany.

CHAPTER 22: THE DEAL

In early 1963, Coch tells Funder, he was prepared to sneak out of East Berlin with the help of his student friends, who were staying in Frau Paul's apartment. The plan was to wait for word from a courier, who would tell the group where to find the building that led to a tunnel into West Berlin. The group moved to the address the courier signaled, which today, Funder finds, is just a normal-looking apartment complex. But when Coch knocked on the apartment door and gave the password, the people inside took him to the police. Frau Paul's attempt to get into West Berlin had been foiled once again.

Once again, Frau Paul was unable to cross into West Berlin. It's possible that the courier himself was informing to the Stasi—he needed Coch to incriminate himself by knocking on the door and giving the password. By this time, it's clear, the Stasi had gained a vast network of informants, and it was very difficult to find someone to truly trust.

Shortly afterwards, Frau Paul was arrested by the Stasi. They offered her a deal: she'd be allowed to be with her child—who, they claimed, was very ill—if she helped them capture Michael Hinze. In that moment, Frau Paul tells Funder, she remembered Karl Wilhelm Fricke, the iconic German journalist. In the 1950s, Fricke was a prominent opponent of the Stasi, and even after he was imprisoned, he risked his own life by broadcasting the story of how the Stasi had tried to bully him into silence. Offered a deal by the Stasi, Frau Paul decided to refuse and remain apart from her child. As she explains this to Funder, she weeps. Funder realizes that Frau Paul's decision, while brave, left her a "guilt-wracked wreck."

Frau Paul was offered a Faustian bargain: she'd gain her child, but she'd lose her friends and her sense of personal dignity and honor. Instead of cooperating with the Stasi and taking the deal, Paul heroically chose to protect her friends. However, as Funder points out, Paul's decision left her emotionally scarred for years to come: she acted "bravely," but partly because she didn't think through the consequences of her bravery, and this morally "righteous" act affected her and her child in many negative ways.

CHAPTER 23: HOHENSCHÖNHAUSEN

After the Stasi detained Frau Paul, she and her husband were imprisoned and then tried for collaborating against the authority of the East German government. She was found guilty and sent to Hohenschönhausen, where she served almost two years. Frau Paul takes Funder to this infamous prison building. Inside, Paul shows Funder the cell in which she was kept—it's so tiny that she can't even stand upright. Every day, Paul would hear the sounds of other prisoners going mad with fear and boredom.

Earlier in the book, Klaus mentioned Hohenschönhausen in his song; it was one of the largest and most infamous prisons in East Germany. Paul endured months of agony as a result of her decision to remain true to her morals and apart from her child.

While Frau Paul was in prison, Torsten remained in the hospital in West Germany, barely surviving. Doctors remember that Torsten, in spite of his sickness, was "the darling of the ward." Michael Hinze continued to live in West Germany, and was never arrested or assassinated by the Stasi. After Frau Paul and her husband were released from jail in 1964, they got word that Torsten was celebrating Easter in the hospital, and had painted a picture for his parents. He was released from the hospital at the age of five and sent back to East Germany.

Frau Paul must have thought about Torsten every day: she was worried about his sickly condition, and wanted to take care of him. Paul was eventually reunited with her son, but by this time she'd missed out on five full years of his life, a loss she'd never fully recover.

Frau Paul could now be with Torsten, and yet Torsten had no concept of life outside his hospital. Sometimes, Torsten felt like a stranger. Frau Paul introduces Funder to Torsten, a small, unhealthy-looking man. He tells Funder that he's proud of his mother for making the decision not to cooperate with the Stasi. Torsten grew up moving back and forth between East and West Berlin for medical reasons, and as a result various people asked him to smuggle things over the border. The Stasi asked him to inform on these people but he refused. Today, he collects a government invalid pension and claims to live "for the day." He tells Funder he's glad the **Berlin Wall** is no more—if it were still around, "It would remind me that it could come back. That everything that's happened might be reversed."

The chapter ends on a melancholy note: Torsten doesn't seem to begrudge his mother for her decision not to cooperate with the Stasi, and he even seems to have taken inspiration from her (hence his own refusal to cooperate). And yet there's an undeniable gap between Paul and Torsten, caused by their five years of separation—as Paul admits, Torsten sometimes felt like a stranger to her. Torsten's parting thoughts could be a thesis statement for Stasiland *itself: the advancement of German society, while worth celebrating, is still fragile and even reversible.*

CHAPTER 24: HERR BOHNSACK

Funder speaks to one more "Stasi man," Herr Bohnsack. Over drinks in a pub, Bohnsack tells Funder about his time in Division X, the top-secret segment of the Stasi tasked with "disinformation and psychological warfare against the west."

Each Stasi officer to whom Funder speaks is a little more secretive than the one before: Division X, we learn, was a top-secret sector of the Stasi (and with a Hollywood-esque name to boot).

Herr Bohnsack studied journalism, and spent most of his information spreading false or sensitive information for the Stasi. One of Division X's chief responsibilities was leaking information about West Germany, such as the identities of West German spies. Division X bribed West German politicians to vote for policies the East German government preferred. As time went on, however, Division X became less active. By 1989 they had standing orders to stay at home so as not to provoke demonstrators. In the final days of the East German state, Bohnsack spent days destroying secret information.

Thanks to officers such as Bohnsack, the Stasi wielded a lot of power in other countries, even West Germany, East Germany's sworn enemy. But over time, even Division X lost some of its power. As Funder has suggested already, the fact that the Stasi destroyed so much of its own information might suggest a guilty conscience, and the awareness that what they were doing wasn't right (or even legal).

Bohnsack received word that somebody was about to publish a secret document containing the names and addresses of more than 20,000 Stasi employees. Knowing he had to get ahead of the story, Bohnsack contacted *Der Spiegel*, one of the most famous West German papers, and revealed himself as a Stasi agent. He also talked about some of the things he did as a Stasi agent—forever alienating him from his colleagues. For many years after 1989, Bohnsack received death threats because he went to the press.

It's interesting that the vast majority of Stasi agents didn't take after Bohnsack—in other words, they remained loyal to their organization and to each other. This might suggest that many Stasi agents were sincere in their commitment to their cause (or, alternatively, Stasi agents had been trained to stick together, even when doing so conflicted with their own interests).

That night, Funder gets a call from home—doctors have found tumors in her mother's head, meaning that Funder will need to go home and be with her family. She calls Miriam and informs her that she'll be leaving soon. Back at home, Funder explains, she spends time with her mother before she dies, nine months later. She's consumed with grief, and takes three years before returning to Berlin.

Funder's journey through Berlin comes, like the East German state itself, to an abrupt end. But she continues to ponder her interviewees' life stories, even while she's attending to her own mother.

CHAPTER 25: BERLIN, SPRING 2000

Back in Berlin in the spring of 2000, Funder surveys the beautiful greenery and handsome buildings. She returns to the same apartment in which she lived previously. Before arriving, she's sent a letter to Miriam, explaining that she'd tried to write Miriam's story, but found that she needed to do more research first. Funder also emails Julia letting her know she'll be back in the city. Julia tells Funder that she's living in San Francisco, working in a feminist bookstore and taking part in anti-rape demonstrations.

In just three years, Berlin has changed enormously. Many of the people with whom Funder spoke previously, such as Julia, have left town. Julia's behavior suggests that she's still haunted by her past trauma, and is becoming involved in feminist and anti-rape groups to protect others from being assaulted as she was.

Early in the morning, Funder sips coffee and studies the famous statue of Heinrich Heine, the great German poet. She watches two park workers chatting—eventually, they notice her and ask her where she's from. When Funder answers, "Australia," one of the park workers laughs and says, "Don't worry about it. I too have impure blood."

The scene echoes Funder's description of the public pool in an earlier chapter. In both cases, Funder notices details that allude sinisterly to the country's Nazi past (in the pool, Funder saw yellow armbands; here, a worker mentions impure blood).

The park worker tells Funder that he's headed to go mushroom picking. In old East Germany, he says, he was a tailor. He complains that, since 1989, rent and food prices have gone up. Funder has heard people voice similar sentiments before—she always thinks that they're coloring "a cheap and nasty world golden." The man goes on to describe how the **Berlin Wall** used to run near the Heine statue—however, he insists, people had nothing to fear from the Wall as long as they didn't get too close to it. He concludes, "you really should come mushrooming with us." Funder thanks him, but then returns to her apartment.

Many people who once despised East Germany are now vaguely nostalgic for it: they find the rapid-fire change of the contemporary German state disorienting and alienating. People such as the park worker seem to have a lot of delusions about East Germany—for example, that citizens wouldn't be harmed as long as they obeyed the rules, and that the economy is worse now than it was twenty years ago. All this only proves the human tendency to forget or idealize—and therefore to repeat—the past, and to not *learn from our mistakes (something present in almost every country, not just Germany).*

CHAPTER 26: THE WALL

Late at night, Funder walks through the streets of Berlin, passing by a drunk man. The man cries, "I don't want to be a German any more!" and adds, "The Germans are terrible." Funder wonders, "Were his people, now broke or drunk, shamed or fled or imprisoned or dead, any good at all?"

As the drunk man's words might suggest, many Germans still haven't come to terms with their country's violent past. This uncomfortable truth undercuts the elated mood of the new, reunified German state.

A few days later, Funder learns that there's been a request for the Stasi surveillance file on Mielke himself. It occurs to Funder that "Mielke must think the apparatus he created was so thorough … that somewhere, someone was keeping tabs on him."

Mielke was slavishly devoted to the efficiency of the Stasi surveillance effort, to the point where the Stasi institution was more powerful than Mielke himself.

Funder reunites with Frau Paul, who's been involved with organizing people who were persecuted in East Germany. Some people have been harassing her lately—presumably, ex-Stasi agents. Shortly afterwards, Mielke dies at the age of 92—headlines read, "Most hated man now dead." Shortly afterwards, in a phone interview, Von Schnitzler tells Funder that Mielke has been unfairly vilified—largely because of "naked, brutal" capitalism.

Mielke's death brings little catharsis to East Germany, even though Mielke symbolized the cruelty of East Germany for many people: ex-Stasi agents continue to harass Paul, and others debate over Mielke's reputation, suggesting that Germany has yet to reach real closure regarding its recent past—and perhaps never will.

Funder finds that a portion of the **Berlin Wall** has become a tourist destination—"airbrushed for effect." At the Wall, Funder runs into Hagen Koch, who leads tours of the Wall. The next day, Koch takes Funder around the Wall. He points out the area where the Wall used to stand, now empty. He also shows Funder to a garden located near the Wall. The garden was technically in East Berlin, but the wall zigzagged around, leaving it accessible to West Berliners. A Turkish family planted vegetables there, and the garden continues to thrive. At the end of his private tour, Koch gives Funder a piece of the Wall. He promises it's genuine, though, Funder thinks, "There have probably been enough 'genuine' fragments of the Wall sold to build it twice over."

In this passage, Funder describes the way the new German state has treated the Berlin Wall—and, implicitly, East German history in general—like a historical curiosity, to be commodified, fetishized, and gawked at. In reality—as Funder has shown throughout her book—East Germany history is still a part of many people's day-to-day lives, and they're not yet ready to treat it as an "airbrushed" relic of the distant past.

CHAPTER 27: PUZZLERS

Funder takes the train to Nuremberg so she can visit the Stasi File Authority office, located in a village nearby. The director, Herr Raillard, has run the office since 1995. There, dozens of people—and not, contrary to rumor, strictly women—are paid to reassemble **shredded documents**. Computers could, in theory, do the work, but, according to Raillard, these wouldn't count as "originals," and therefore wouldn't be legally authoritative. Raillard takes Funder into a room of workers sifting through masses of shredded paper.

Funder ends her book by focusing on the symbolic work of painstakingly reassembling the shredded legacy of East Germany. Bizarrely, the intricacies of German law make it impractical for computers to reassemble the documents, even though they'd be able to do so much more quickly than human workers. As a result, it's going to be a long time before all Germans know the truth about Stasi surveillance.

When Funder interviews workers at the office, they tell Funder they're still moved and baffled by the size of the Stasi surveillance effort. One employee criticizes the Stasi for manipulating people into informing on their friends and family—but also points out that the Stasi officers were themselves manipulated. Raillard shows Funder calculations suggesting that it would take 40 people nearly 400 years to reassemble the **shredded documents**—and there are only 31 people in the office. Funder is stunned. She thinks about Miriam and the hidden files that changed her life forever, and wonders when, if ever, these files will be reassembled.

By the time some of the Stasi surveillance files are reassembled, the people they concern will be long deceased. Clearly, the government could speed up the process by hiring more workers, but the German state seems to be deliberately trying to keep the process slow. But this raises the further question of whether reassembling the files will accomplish anything at all: even if the people have a right to know the truth about the Stasi, will the truth make them feel any better, or make up for the years of paranoia and fear?

CHAPTER 28: MIRIAM AND CHARLIE

On her train ride back to Berlin, Funder decides to get off in Leipzig. She wanders through the city, noting the new buildings and museums. The government has funded an "effort to put the history of the separation of Germany behind glass." One museum, the Contemporary History Forum Leipzig, contains samples of the **Wall** and interactive displays of important episodes in Berlin history. Funder is the only person in the museum, however.

The fact that Funder is the only one in the museum could symbolize the fact that most Germans simply aren't ready to treat East Germany as history yet: they're not ready to put their painful memories of the German state "behind glass."

Funder leaves the museum and walks through the streets. She notices a girl, probably about sixteen years old. This would mean that she's barely old enough to remember the fall of the **Berlin Wall**. Funder thinks about how the girl is the same age that Miriam was when she tried to cross into West Berlin.

The sixteen year-old girl represents how rapidly concrete, visceral realities (such as the Berlin Wall) become figments of the past.

Funder calls Miriam and, to her amazement, Miriam answers and explains that she's back in Leipzig. Miriam agrees to meet Funder. Over tea, Funder tells Miriam about her research, culminating in her visit to the Stasi File Authority office. Miriam tells Funder that, lately, there's been a lot of nostalgia for East Germany, though many of the nostalgic people are too young to remember what the East German state was like. Miriam tells Funder that recently she found a copy of a poem Charlie wrote years ago. Funder suddenly realizes why she found the Leipzig museum strangely frustrating—"Things have been put behind glass, but they are not yet over."

Miriam, more so than any other single character in the book, represents the idea that, though the new German state wants to be "through" with the past, the past is not through with the German people. In other words, East Germany history continues to play a part in German people's day-to-day thoughts: their worries, their fears, their triumphs, etc.

Miriam shows Funder a photo of herself with Charlie. Funder gently asks Miriam what Charlie was like, and she says that Charlie was sensitive but reserved, with a good sense of humor. She loved her marriage, because she and Charlie were comfortable with being alone. Miriam recalls how hard life became when she and Charlie tried to leave East Germany—people harassed them in the streets.

Clearly Miriam is still haunted by the death of her husband, whom she seems to have loved dearly. Furthermore, she seems to have unconsciously taken all the troubles and traumas of her past and associated them with the still unsolved mystery of his death.

Miriam hasn't given up trying to exhume Charlie's coffin. Recently, she's spoken with a witness who was in prison with Charlie on the day he supposedly hanged himself. That morning, the witness recalls, there was some kind of "commotion" in Charlie's cell. Miriam guesses that the guards beat up Charlie and left him to die, slowly and painfully. Funder imagines that Miriam could be right—but she wonders, "will digging him up reveal anything?" Miriam, Funder realizes, wants "some kind of justice," even if she doesn't know exactly what.

Even after years of trying, Miriam hasn't been able to solve the mystery of Charlie's death. But as Funder points out, it's not clear if finding the truth will bring Miriam any real peace or happiness. Miriam seems to feel an indescribable compulsion to learn about Charlie's death—she has a sense that the truth will provide her with "some kind of justice" and, perhaps, some closure or satisfaction, easing the pain she's felt for the last two decades.

Funder spends the night at Miriam's house, and the next morning Miriam takes her to the station. On the train back into Berlin, Funder reads Charlie's poem. It reads, "In this land / I have made myself sick with silence / In this land / I have wandered, lost / In this land / I hunkered down to see / What will become of me. / In this land / I held myself tight / So as not to scream. / - But I did scream, so loud / That this land howled back at me / As hideously / As it builds its houses. / In this land / I have been sown / Only my head sticks / Defiant, out of the earth / But one day it too will be mown / Making me, finally / Of this land."

Charlie's poem describes the relationship between people and their society ("the land"). Charlie's tone is dark as he describes the way East Germany has censored him and tortured him—he even seems to prophesize his own death, noting how, one day, the land will cut off his head. And yet there's also a valedictory, defiant tone to the poem as Charlie describes how, until the day he dies, he'll cry out, denouncing his land—while still remaining a crucial part of it. In all, the poem seems to represent Charlie's (and many other characters') conflicted, often love-hate relationship with the East German state.

Back in Berlin, Funder watches people play in the park: "People shake infants up and down to make them calm, and children spin on swings and roundabouts I never noticed were there."

The book ends on an ambiguous note. Over the course of her years in Berlin, Funder has learned a lot about East German history by interviewing people (symbolized, perhaps, by the "spins and roundabouts" she mentions here). She's uncovered a lot of pain, as well as a lot of pride and triumph. Meanwhile, life goes on—children are being born, none of whom will ever entirely understand what it was like to live in East Germany before 1989. But in her book, Funder has tried to record some of the lost stories of the era—stories which future generations should study closely, both as cautionary tales and as sources of inspiration.

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