

ENGLISH: *STASILAND*

Anna Funder constructs a black and white view of victims and perpetrators in 'Stasiland'. To what extent do you agree?

To an extent, the victims and perpetrators in 'Stasiland' are portrayed by Funder in a black and white manner. Funder overtly presents Miriam, Frau Paul and Julia as the victims while Herr Bock, Herr Winz and Von-Schnitzler are seen as perpetrators. She constructs this black and white view through emphasising the loss, suffering and trauma experienced by the victims whilst expressing the ruthless and inhumane actions carried out by the Stasi. Other characters however, such as Herr Christian, Heinz Koch and Hagen Koch are constructed in a more complex manner and this therefore shows the grey area existing between the black and white portrayals and depicts the different 'consciences' within each of the characters.

Funder conveys a black and white portrayal of the primary victims in the text to a large extent through allowing the characters to tell their stories whilst making use of her own voice as a narrator. Her narrative voice gives rise to interpretations and assumptions and therefore influences the reader to feel sympathy for those wronged by the Stasi. Although biased, this technique consequently portrays those who acted immorally towards the victims negatively and thus the reader is presented with black and white view of the victims and their subsequent offenders. Through narration, Funder often includes her own opinions and observations to further evoke sympathy towards the characters. Frau Paul is observed by Funder to have been *"Already holding a pressed handkerchief."* pg 204. The inclusion of this information enables Funder to evoke sympathy towards her and emphasise her vulnerable character. Funder also assumes that she has been deeply affected by the GDR. She often uses assumptions through her narrative voice to further divide the perpetrators from the victims. Julia is described as a *'Hermit crab'* pg 90. This allows Funder to convey her shy, vulnerable and innocent nature and as one is often inclined to side with and feel sympathy for a victim, the reader is made to feel completely sympathetic towards Julia without doubts. Furthermore, Funder positions the reader to see Miriam as a brave character that stood up to the GDR regime. She is never depicted in a negative light, only through a positive one to portray her heroic actions and feel sympathy for the trauma and tics she now experiences as a result of confinement.

The main perpetrators are largely depicted negatively in a black and white manner. Herr Bock, Herr Winz and Von-Schnitzler are conveyed only as dark, cold and inhumane characters devoid of happiness, innocence and altruism. The reader is positioned by Funder through narration and the use of vivid imagery to view these characters in a negative light, evoking feelings of uneasiness, fear and shock in regards to their beliefs. Herr Bock is an intimidating character who holds the same beliefs he did when he was working for the Stasi. *"Here he is once more getting the trust of his people and selling them cheap."* 202. It is evidently absurd to Funder that there is no sign or remorse in these characters and the motives of these men will never change. Through this, she is able to portray them purely as perpetrators. Vivid imagery and attention to minute details allows Funder to paint an image in the reader's mind to further emphasise the disturbed nature of the wrongdoing Stasi men. Von-Schnitzler is depicted as an offensive and loud *'bully'*. *"He looks at me and I can see the tiny red veins filigreed across his eyeballs."*pg 138. This emphasises his irrational nature, further conveying his rage and inability to exert control over his actions. The inability to exert control over oneself can then be linked with the GDR regime, whereby the perpetrators in power of the GDR had a deep desire for power which obstructed the view of all else. The red veins through Von Schnitzler's eyes therefore show the dark thoughts of the perpetrators, their aspiration for power and profound belief for the GDR's ideologies. This constructs a negative insight into the intentions of these men and the reader is made to view them as selfish and rude characters, qualities of which are unappealing.

Whilst to large extent, Funder presents the victims and perpetrators in black and white, other characters are portrayed in a more intricate manner. This allows Funder to show the different consciences present in each character and the extent to which they have been affected by the Stasi. Through analysing a wide range of people who have lived through the GDR society, Funder is able to better represent the reality of East Germany and thus endow a greater sense of credibility through her writing. If the characters in the text were purely written in a black and white form, the reader is unlikely to trust Funder's opinions and perhaps not perceive the main victims and perpetrators with strong emotions. Therefore the grey area between the two is presented so as to allow the reader to trust Funder as a narrator and enhance the negativity towards the Stasi men and the sympathy towards the victims.

Heinz Koch, Hagen Koch and Herr Christian are depicted as perpetrators who no longer believe in the GDR's ideologies. Although they worked for the Stasi, they are not categorised as perpetrators by Funder as they have shown remorse and regret for taking part. Funder uses these characters to show the contrasting views between the real perpetrators, and those who worked for the Stasi but did not believe in their ideologies. *"I think of herr winz and herr Christian and herr Koch and the different kinds of consciences there are."*pg 193-3 Herr Winz is described by Funder to have a dark conscience and is therefore depicted as a perpetrator. Herr Christian however, only worked for the Stasi as he was a stickler for the law. Funder represents his complex character through his smile, described as that of 'a gangster, or an angel'. Pg 149. This shows that he is not a victim nor a perpetrator but a regular citizen who thought his job was similar to a policeman. Herr Koch, was brought up to believe in the GDR as a result of the threats from the Stasi to his father. This character shows that one with good morals can ultimately rise above the GDR's attempt of indoctrination and control. Hagen Koch was able to rebel against the Stasi through stealing the plate despite his pro-GDR upbringing. Even though he worked for the Stasi for a while, eventually he was able to realise their corrupt nature and leave.

The reader is positioned to a large extent, to view the victims and perpetrators in 'Stasiland' in black and white. The primary victims and perpetrators are depicted in this way to show the brutal and inhumane actions of the Stasi whilst evoking sympathy towards the victims. Not all characters however, are presented in this way as some are portrayed in a way that neither fits into the category of a victim or a perpetrator. These characters show the different levels and consciences in the GDR society and therefore depict the reality of East Germany.

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