

ENGLISH – STASILAND & NEVER LET ME GO

Compare the ways the truth is distorted and exploited in *Stasiland* & *Never Let Me Go*.

The nexus between knowledge and power is explored in both Anna Funder's *Stasiland* and Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*. Both agree that the truth is distorted in order to dehumanise the powerless, thus consolidating the power of authoritative figures. However, Funder contends that acceptance of this truth serves as a source of further suffering whereas Ishiguro contends that it serves as a source of freedom.

Both Funder and Ishiguro agree that the truth is distorted and misconstrued in order to dehumanise the sub-strata of the population. Funder epitomises the Stasi's dogged pursuit of "the most perfected surveillance state of all time" through Von Schnitzler. His ability to "switch from one view to another," is characteristic of a regime with such power, that "the truth does not matter because you cannot be contradicted." In portraying the Stasi through Von Schnitzler, Funder aims to demonstrate the overwhelming nature of the Stasi's power, and thus how they made decisions based on a narrative in which they were supreme leaders. This notion is cemented when Funder says of Herr Bock's story that it represented "perfected dictator-logic," in that whenever the Stasi opened an investigation, it meant that the individual was "an enemy." Thus, Funder paints the Stasi as an organisation that misconstrued the truth in an attempt to dehumanise their population. Similarly, Ishiguro employs the Normals to demonstrate the effects of a continual distortion of the truth on the objectification of clones. This objectification is prevalent when Miss Lucy quips that Normals "are quite happy" to keep the clones misinformed about their ultimate fate and that despite the teachers' best efforts to prove the clones "has souls," they were unable to sway the effects of the ever-increasing burden of propaganda from the Normals. Therefore, Ishiguro demonstrates the sheer power that an authority has over its subservient population, as well as how little can be done to counteract said power. Thus, both authors agree that those power aim to dehumanise their subservient populations via propaganda and a misconstrued reality.

In fostering propaganda, both authors convey authorities that aim to consolidate their power by objectifying their population and, ultimately, propagating a false sense of hope amongst their constituents. In *Stasiland*, Funder employs Hagen Koch, whose stolen golden plate carries heavy resemblance to a "cheap toy," and yet it represented "all...the courage" he had to give during the reign of the Stasi. Funder shows that by objectifying their population, the Stasi indirectly created an environment in which the smallest acts of defiance were glorified. As a result, it gave their population the illusion that they could defy the might of the Stasi, which, in turn, served to give their population a false sense of hope that only consolidated their power. Similarly, Ishiguro employs Ruth to demonstrate the damaging effects of a society that instils a false sense of hope in its population in an effort to consolidate power. Initially, Ruth is an individual that always wants to "believe in things," however upon realising that she cannot defer her "donation," she resigns herself to the fact that all clones are "modelled from trash." Ishiguro alludes to the destructive nature of an authoritarian regime giving an individual a glimmer of hope, only to snatch it away, ultimately rendering the individual broken and more reliant on those in power, thus consolidating the power of the regime. Thus, both authors concur that powerful figures in both texts aim to consolidate their power by propagating a false sense of hope amongst their population.

While Funder, working from reality, believes that that acceptance of the distorted truth only serves as a source of strife, Ishiguro, working in fiction, contends that it acts as a source of freedom. In *Stasiland*, Frau Paul epitomises the resulting effects of knowledge on one's mental state. Despite knowing the repercussions of defying the Stasi, she chooses to protect

the students and yet, she does not "picture herself as a hero, or a dissident." Rather, she is left a "lonely, teary guilt-wracked wreck," as the picture she has of herself is "the one the Stasi made for her." Funder shows how, despite being fully aware of the weight of her actions, Frau Paul is left to loathe her actions, thus demonstrating the immense and wide-reaching power of an authority that can manipulate the truth and by extension, its population. On the contrary, Ishiguro employs Kathy to demonstrate how accepting one's reality can be a rare source of freedom under an authoritarian regime. When Kathy says that "something in [her] just gave up," it demonstrates a deep psychological resignation that ultimately leads her to accept her fate as a donor and inspires a pervasive sense of futility that fosters her rare sense of nonchalance in the face unwavering adversity. This exhibits Ishiguro's belief that accepting one's fate, even if it may be dire, will allow them to make the most of an otherwise wasted life, thus giving them the opportunity to experience the rarities of life rather than quarrelling with the bleakness of one's destiny. Thus, Funder contends that accepting the truth fosters pain whereas Ishiguro argues it fosters freedom.

Overall, both Funder and Ishiguro concur that the truth is distorted in order to objectify the sub-strata of the population, thus consolidating the power of authoritative figures. However, Funder argues accepting the distorted truth serves as a source of suffering whereas Ishiguro believes that it serves as a source of freedom.