

Damage at the hands  
of the state:  
comparative analysis  
of 1984 and stasiland



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

While some of the damage suffered by totalitarian governments appears to be only temporary, most forms of harm are shown to be more permanent and long-lasting. As explored in the figures of both Orwell's dystopian novel 1984 and Funder's journalistic narrative Stasiland, psychological suffering has greater long-term effects compared to physical suffering. Non-permanent damage throughout the texts is presented as temporary relief that is short-lived and useless in the scheme of things. Factors determine the extent of how much one suffers at the hands of the state, such as severity of relationships with others and the individual's faith and loyalty to the government, and how even the most faithful can face the dire consequences of their actions.

Though both physical and psychological suffering is shown throughout both texts, physical damage is proven to be the hardest to overcome. Although Miriam suffers from scarring on her hands as a result of climbing the wall and from the brutal treatment in prison, the psychological torture such as sleep deprivation took a larger toll on her, as "sleep deprivation also causes a number of neurological dysfunctions, which become more extreme the longer it continues", and it is evident that the effects of her emotional torture in prison lived on. Likewise Winston was physically tortured in imprisonment, though it was the use of fear (threatening him with rats) that triggered the conversion of his morals and beliefs to 'become loyal' to Big Brother. His former partner Julia, though suffering facial scarring from the rats, lost her love and trust of Winston due to his betrayal and not the event of torture. In this sense, psychological harm is shown to have greater impact on individuals compared to the bodily harm they face.

Non-permanent damage, or the relief of harm caused by the state, is presented in both texts as temporary and short-lived. From the beginning of the text Winston suffers from a Varicose ulcer. Winston's varicose ulcer is an expression of his consistently repressed humanity: repressed emotions, actions, and sexuality. Orwell continues to refer to the ulcer throughout the work – “ his veins had swelled with the effort of the cough, and the varicose ulcer had started itching,” but the ulcer is unmentioned during his rebellious escapade with his lover Julia. This is only a temporary relief, as the state's control returns and Winston's suffering continues, something was ‘ killed in (his) breast from which (he) could not recover’ like he had tried to do with the ulcer. Similarly, Julia in Stasiland decided to physically escape her painful memories by moving to San Francisco, but it is suggested that her damage is unrecoverable. The fact that she works in a feminist book store suggests that she is still holding onto the event that she endured and still longs for a sense of justice. She is thankful that they “ honour their victims here” and in a sense feels “ much more at home than in my own country”. Despite a sense of closure Funder suggests that Julia has been so severely traumatised and her trust so deeply betrayed that she will struggle to heal the psychological wounds. This verifies her comment to Funder, “ I think I'm definitely psychologically damaged!. She laughs, but she means it.” The sense of disabling damage or injury in both texts have either doomed culminations or have an underlying sense that their damage is impossible to overcome.

Even those most loyal to the state are shown to suffer permanent at their hands, as explored in both texts. While many former Stasi officers are described to have positive outcomes or even similar lives – Von Schnitzler

holding firmly onto his beliefs as a 'true believer' and Herr Christian 'pretty much doing the same job as (he) did back then' as a private detective, Funder sympathises with Herr Koch who evidently suffered enduringly at the hands of the state. Herr Koch is described as bitter and defiant because the Stasi completely ruined his life, his marriage, and his career, and so flippantly cleaned his desk of all his belongings after he was made redundant. All he had managed to salvage as testimony to his amazing dedication to the Stasi was the plate, while in comparison the Stasi did 'quite a bit of damage' to him. He was extremely determined to seize the plate as a sign of his small act of control; a small act of revenge. His wife lost her job, and he was labelled a thief and 'perjurer'. Likewise, Parsons was portrayed as a heavy, sweaty, simple man whom Winston despises for his unquestioning acceptance of everything the Party tells him. Parsons is active in his community groups, and appears to truly believe Party claims and doctrine. However, his daughter eventually denounces him to the Thought Police, claiming he was saying "Down with Big Brother" in his sleep, which Tom was ironically proud of. Despite his complete and utter allegiance to the state, he suffers imprisonment and presumably torture the same way Winston did. Even those standing beside the governing body with faithfulness in their procedures and policies face everlasting damage from the state.

Damage faced by figures and characters, though in some cases temporary relief is found, is proven to have prominent perpetual effects on the individual. Psychological suffering in terms of torture and memory is shown to have a greater impact than physical injury such as scarring. Relief from

damage is presented as fleeting in both texts as individuals face reparations of escaping the state, or are suggested to take their past with them when trying to move on. Not only do the victims face damage, but perpetrators and those loyal to the state face permanent damage just the same. Evidently, all damage suffered by the state is proven to be permanent.