



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

Seminar Series
School of Languages & Linguistics

Australian Voices in Germany: The translation of Anna Funder's *Stasiland*

(in English)

Leah Gerber

Monash University

Anna Funder's *Stasiland* (2002) provides English-speaking audiences with a stimulating account of life in East Germany under the watchful eye of the *Stasi* (the East German secret police), exposing stories of those who fell victim to the regime as well as of its various collaborators. It was published to great acclaim in Australia, the UK and the USA, yet German publishers were uneasy with the prospect of publishing a book – written by a ‘non-German’ – that deals with a particularly sensitive aspect of Germany's past. Yet Australian-born Funder, who is fluent in German and has lived and studied in Berlin, approached the issue of Germany's past with a certain degree of authority. Funder appears to fulfil the role of both a ‘bilingual’ and ‘bicultural’ observer.

When it was eventually translated into German (in 2004), Funder came under considerable attack, particularly by East Germans who failed to grasp why she, as an ‘outsider’, had the ‘right’ to write about ‘us’. Funder then made various attempts, via the German print media, to mediate the conflict between ‘us’ and ‘them’, commenting: “Where I come from, writers can write about almost anything they choose” and, furthermore, “From what authority should I have sought permission?” (Funder 2004).

An analysis of these paratexts highlights the issue of authority in regards to agency, authorship and translation. Indeed, the case of Australian authors having

to mediate between two cultures and languages is not isolated to Funder's work: the paper will introduce other examples, including the work of Markus Zusack and children's author, Colin Thiele (both of whom have German background), and discuss issues of translation and reception. It questions how one undertakes the task of translating a text that is linguistically foreign to the target audience, but culturally "equivalent" and subsequently assesses the success of any 're-writing' the translator may have introduced in order to make the text fit better within the expected norms of the target audience.

Time:	3:30-5:00pm
Date:	Friday 22 May 2009
Location:	Room 602, Arts Centre, University of Melbourne