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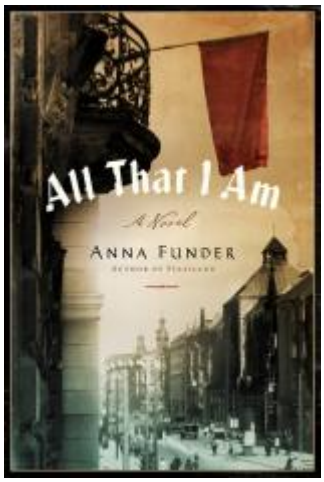
All That I Am

by Anna Funder



About the Book

ALL THAT I AM is a masterful and exhilarating exploration of bravery and betrayal, of the risks and sacrifices some people make for their beliefs, and of heroism hidden in the most unexpected places.

When 18-year-old Ruth Becker visits her cousin Dora in Munich in 1923, she meets the love of her life, the dashing young journalist Hans Wesemann, and eagerly joins in the heady activities of the militant political Left in Germany. Ten years later, Ruth and Hans are married and living in Weimar Berlin when Hitler is elected chancellor of Germany. Together with Dora and her lover, Ernst Toller, the celebrated poet and self-doubting revolutionary, the four become hunted outlaws overnight and are forced to flee to London. Inspired by the fearless Dora to breathtaking acts of courage, the friends risk betrayal and deceit as they dedicate themselves to a dangerous mission: to inform the British government of the very real Nazi threat to which it remains willfully blind. ALL THAT I AM is the heartbreaking story of these extraordinary people, who discover that Hitler's reach extends much further than they had thought.

Gripping, compassionate and inspiring, this remarkable debut novel reveals an uncommon depth of humanity and wisdom. Anna Funder has given us a searing and intimate portrait of courage and its price, of desire and ambition, and of the devastating consequences when they are thwarted.

Discussion Guide

1. All That I Am is a novel is based on real people's lives. What does a fictional narrative offer a reader and writer that pure history does not?

2. The novel is told in past and present, and the voices of two characters, Ruth and Ernst. What do these different viewpoints add to the telling?

3. In reflecting on her life, Ruth attributes her survival to "God's irrationality." Why does she say this?

4. Describe Dora. How did Ruth see her? What about Ernst? Discuss their relationships. How did Dora influence Ruth? How did Ernst influence Dora? Why was she so devoted to him? Dora saw Ernst as a hero. Do you think she was braver than he was?

5. What were the forces that held Dora, Ruth, Ernst, Hans, and their friend Bertie together? How much did their youth contribute to their idealism? What kept them from falling under the spell of Hitler like so many of their contemporaries? How did they fight back against their enemies?

6. Would you call Dora, Ernst, and their friends inspiring or foolish? Do people like Dora and Ernst make a difference in the world? What drives someone to sacrifice her life for a cause?

7. What would have happened to Dora, Ernst, and Ruth if they had not fled Germany? Ruth plays down their plight. “There was nothing grand about us though. Everyone was dislocated and struggling---without our language, without money, without readership or purpose. Our lives only had meaning if we were to continue to help with the underground in Germany, and to alert the rest of the world to Hitler’s plan for the world.” Is that truly the only reason their lives held meaning?

8. What was life like for these exiles in England? Why did they have such a difficult time spreading their message? How did they cope with their fear---both before they left Germany and after?

9. What caused Hans to act as he did? Did you see this coming?

10. What ultimately happened to Dora? How did the final events of the novel affect Ernst and Ruth? Would you say they suffered from survivor’s guilt?

11. In reading **All That I Am**, how much control did the characters have over their own lives? How much control do you think anyone has---or are individuals pawns of those in power?

12. At the novel’s end, Ruth poses the question: “Will the world forget we tried so hard to save it?” How do you answer her?

Author Bio

Anna Funder is an Australian writer who grew up in Melbourne. She has worked as an international lawyer specializing in human rights and constitutional law. She is the prizewinning author of *Stasiland: Stories from Behind the Berlin Wall*, which has been published in twenty countries and translated into sixteen languages. In 2004 *Stasiland* won the BBC Samuel Johnson Prize, the most prestigious nonfiction award in the United Kingdom. *All That I Am* is her first novel. Anna Funder lives in Brooklyn with her husband and children.

Critical Praise

"A literary work as suspenseful as the best thrillers, Funder’s extraordinary first novel is an unflinching portrait of courage in devastating circumstances."

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