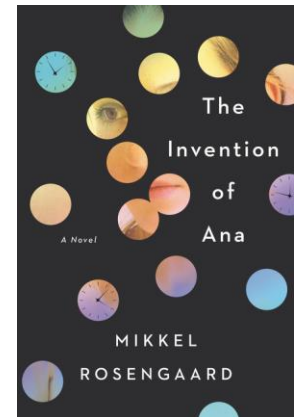


THE INVENTION OF ANA

Custom House

By Mikkel Rosengard
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Introduction

Combining the infectious narration of Nick Hornby's *Funny Girl*, the philosophical lyricism of Roberto Bolaño's *The Savage Detectives*, and the mesmerizing power of Anna North's *The Life and Death of Sophie Stark*, a breathtaking debut, brimming with youthful brio and irresistible humor, that chronicles a young man's friendship with a most peculiar artist.

On a rooftop in Brooklyn on a spring night, a young intern and would-be writer, newly arrived from Copenhagen, meets the intriguing Ana Ivan. Clever and funny, with an air of mystery and melancholia, Ana is a performance artist, a mathematician, and a self-proclaimed time traveler. She is also bad luck, she confesses; she is from a cursed Romanian lineage.

Before long, the intern finds himself seduced by Ana's enthralling stories—of her unlucky countrymen; of her parents' romance during the worst years of Nicolae Ceaucescu's dictatorship; of a Daylight Savings switchover gone horribly wrong. Ana also introduces him to her latest artistic endeavor. Following the astronomical rather than the Gregorian calendar, she is trying to alter her sense of time—an experiment that will lead her to live in complete darkness for one month.

Descending into the blackness with Ana, the intern slowly loses touch with his own existence, entangling himself in the lives of Ana, her starry-eyed mother Maria, and her raging math-prodigy father Ciprian. Peeling back the layers of her past, he eventually discovers the perverse tragedy that has haunted Ana's family for decades and shaped her journey from the streets of Bucharest to the Atlas Mountains of Morocco and finally to New York City.

The Invention of Ana blurs the lines between narrative and memory, perception and reality, identity and authenticity. In his stunning debut novel, Mikkel Rosengard illuminates the profound power of stories to alter the world around us—and the lives of the ones we love.

Questions for Discussion

1. The novel tells the story of Ana, her parents' life during the Ceaușescu dictatorship, and the two surplus years in Ana's life, but the novel is narrated by a man who doesn't play any role in the Ivan family and who isn't even Romanian. What is the effect of having an outsider tell the story? What does the narrator and his fascination with Ana add to the book?

2. Before Ana tells the narrator about her sister, Ana says that her *"time-travel story had already ruined far too many lives, and it would have been better if she'd never told it to anybody"*. Why do you think Ana tells her stories to the narrator? What does the narrator represent to Ana that she needs or can use?
 3. Throughout the novel, there are no quotation marks to indicate dialogue. What is the effect of this seamless blending of Ana's spoken words and the narrator's recounting of the events? How would the novel have been different if Rosengard had provided quotation marks to indicate spoken dialogue?
 4. Ana and her father play a game where they connect random dots on a paper to construct a picture. What does this game tell us about how Ana understands the events of her life? How is this game connected to how she tells her stories? Why do you think Ciprian whispers *"Humbug, humbug"* when they play the game?
 5. The narrator becomes deeply fascinated with Ana's story, yet nothing romantic happens between them. Despite spending many nights together, they never fall in love or try to seduce one another romantically. Could Ana's storytelling be seen as a kind of seduction? What could Rosengard be trying to say by making Ana's story the Don Juan character of the novel?
 6. When Ana's parents first fall in love *"they lay chatting in the garret deep into the night, blithely unaware that they were echoing the state radio broadcasts playing in the background, which spun tales of its own."* What is the effect of juxtaposing Ceaușescu's authoritarian propaganda with the sweet-talk of two lovers?
 7. After the death of her fiancée, Ana says she is *"going to live like a prime number. Wild and unbroken and only divisible by myself."* What does she mean by that? How is "living like a prime number" different from the way Ciprian lived a life of mathematics? Could the Ivan family's obsession with mathematics be seen as method of creating order in a chaotic existence?
 8. Ana deals with many losses—her father's suicide, the death of her fiancée—but in spite of adversity she manages to live a fulfilling, creative life. How do the other characters in the novel deal with loss and adversity? For instance, Ciprian losing his mathematical career, Isak messing up his museum exhibition, Maria and Ciprian losing their first-born. Why do you think Maria and Ana survive their losses, while Ciprian and Isak break down? How do Ana and Maria use storytelling to cope with loss?
 9. Why do you think the relationship between Lærke and the narrator ends? Is it the narrator's fault—is he too absent? Is it Lærke's fault—is she too demanding? Is it Ana's fault—is she too intrusive?
 10. The narrator characterizes himself as *"a shadow of a man"* and *"a mosquito man living off the suffering of others."* Do you agree with these characterizations? Is the narrator taking advantage of Ana and her stories? Or is it Ana and the older brother who are taking advantage of the narrator?
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11. Toward the end of the book, a curator asks the narrator to come to a bakery where he receives Ana's logbook. When he picks it up he feels "*that someone was looking at me, like I was in the middle of a performance or a show*". Why do you think he feels this way? Later, when he tries to throw the logbook out, he cannot bring himself to get rid of it. Why do you think it so difficult for him to let go? Is the logbook the beginning of something new for him?

12. In Adolfo Bioy Casares' novel *The Invention of Morel* (1940) a nameless fugitive falls in love with a woman he later discovers to be just a hologram. The fugitive realizes that the inventor of a holographic machine, Mr. Morel, has captured the woman's actions with his machine in order to reproduce reality and loop her actions for all eternity. Why do you think Rosengard chose the title *The Invention of Ana*? Who could be recreating and looping reality in *The Invention of Ana*? And would Ana be the inventor or the one being invented—or both?

13. The narrator becomes euphoric when he starts writing Ana's stories. What does this tell us about him? Does he only feel alive when he imagines he is living out a story? Is this a common trait in today's society—do we only live through the stories we tell, perform and imagine?
