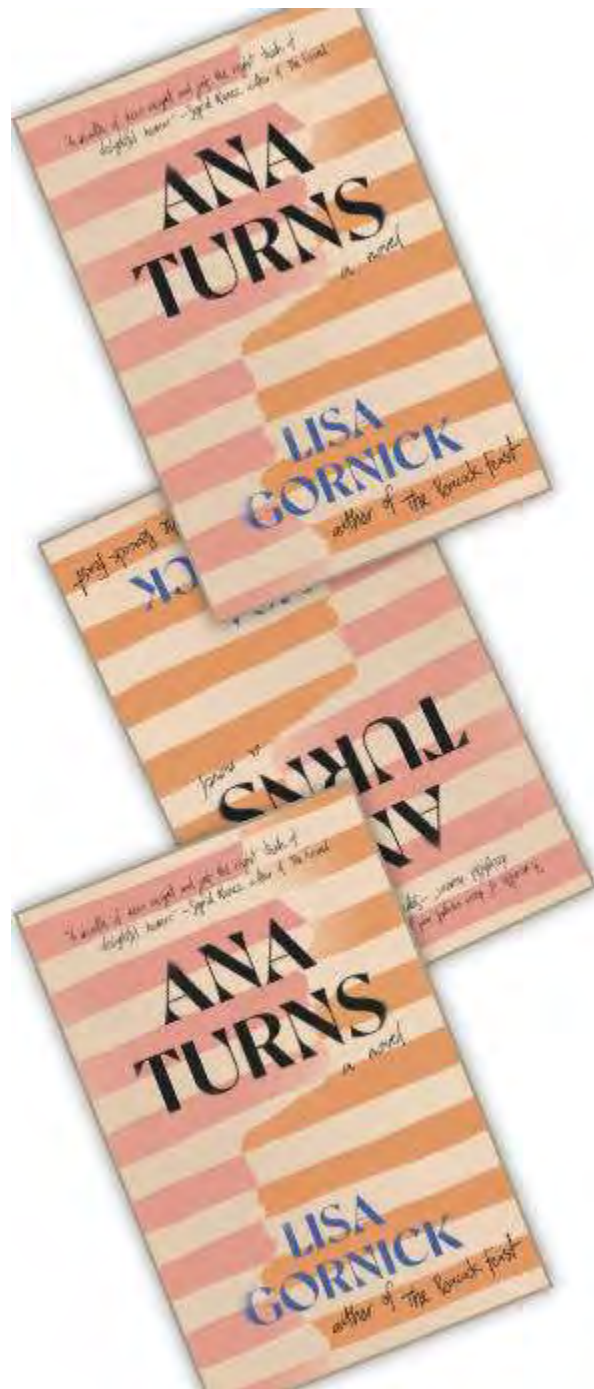


Book Club Kit: ANA TURNS



"A wealth of keen insight and just the right touch of delightful humor."

Sigrid Nunez

"Glorious, hilarious...One of the most original creations I've seen."

Gary Shteyngart

"An exquisitely written love letter to what it means to be a grown-up woman."

Helen Simonson

"Deeply perceptive, surprisingly funny, and smart as hell."

Angie Kim

"A powerful story of a woman coming into her own."

Alice Elliott Dark

www.lisagornickauthor.com



Dear Readers,

I am delighted that you have selected ANA TURNS for your upcoming book club, and hope the information in this kit will sweeten your group's meeting. I have included:

BIO

Discussion Questions

Q&A

Artworks Referenced

Henry's Kale and Button Mushroom Lasagna Recipe

If you're interested in learning more, there are links to podcasts about ANA TURNS and videos of bookstore appearances at lisagornickauthor.com, under the "Events" tab.

I'm always happy to join book groups in person (if practical) or by Zoom or to answer questions by email. You can reach me at lkgornick@gmail.com. I write back!

Warmly,
Lisa

BIO

Lisa Gornick has been hailed by NPR as “one of the most perceptive, compassionate writers of fiction in America...immensely talented and brave.” In addition to *Ana Turns*, she is the author of four previous novels—most recently *The Peacock Feast* and *Louisa Meets Bear*, both published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux and Picador. Her stories and essays have appeared in the *New York Times*, the *Paris Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and *Real Simple*, and have received many honors, including Distinguished Story by the Best American Short Stories.

With the publication of her first novel, *A Private Sorcery*, Lisa Gornick was described by National Book Award Winner Colum McCann as “a new voice...that makes sense of our deep need for stories and their tellers.” Her second novel, *Tinderbox*, was awarded Four out of Four Stars from *People* and deemed “an extraordinary book, written for adults” by National Book Critics Circle Winner Joan Silber. *Louisa Meets Bear* received Starred Reviews from *Publishers Weekly* and *Booklist* and an “A” from *Entertainment Weekly*, and was chosen as a “Fresh Pick” for book clubs by *Oprah.com*, the Long List for The Story Prize, and a Finalist for The 2016 Paterson Fiction Prize. *The Peacock Feast* was proclaimed “truly mighty” by *Newsday*, a “glorious chronicle” by the BBC, a “perfect novel” by the *New Jersey Star-Ledger*, and a “masterpiece” by *Writers on Writing*. Lauded by Rebecca Makkai as “Exactly the book I needed,” Meg Wolitzer described it as “One of those rare books that feel both grand and intimate.”

Lisa Gornick earned a doctorate in clinical psychology at Yale and is a graduate of the writing program at NYU and the psychoanalytic training program at Columbia, where she is on the faculty. For many years, she worked in clinics, hospitals, and private practice as a psychotherapist, a profession she has depicted in various essays as based on “sacred trust.” She lives in New York City with her family.

Discussion Questions

How would you describe Ana's relationship with her mother, Jean? Did you feel any empathy for Jean?

What do you think about Ana's marriage and how do you understand her affair with Lance? What do you imagine will happen in the next year for Ana, Henry, Lance, and Alice?

Simon is in the process of transitioning to become Simona. In your view, how are Ana and Henry are handling this?

Fiona tells Ana that George is not really a brother—an idea that Ana later in the book rejects. What is the nature of this sibling relationship?

The novel shifts into five other points of view other than Ana's: her husband, her father, her brother, her lover, and her lover's wife. How did this impact the book? Do you think the novel could have worked told only thorough Ana's eyes?

Ana Turns includes true stories from the news at that time. Why do you think the author included the story of Kayla Greenwood and Kenneth Williams?

The interview with Mullah Mohammed Omar about his decision to dynamite the Bamiyan Buddhas is also taken from a real news report. What does Lance intend by showing Ana the interview?

Ana thinks about herself as a "psychological editor." What does she mean by this? How does this apply to her work with Bettina?

Henry does not tell Ana the story he learned from her father about the family's history during WW2 because he thinks it would be a breach of physician ethics. Do you think he makes the right decision?

What do you make of Ana's friendship with LuAnn and their teenage adventures? How is it similar and different from her friendship with Fiona?

What is the meaning of the title? Did you notice the allusion to the title in the cover illustration? (Hint: Turn the book upside down...)

If you could ask the author one question, what would it be?

Q and A for ANA TURNS

Q: When and how did you begin to write ANA TURNS?

A: My earliest notes for *Ana Turns* are from March of 2016, while I was still in the thick of revising my previous novel, *The Peacock Feast*. The first entry begins with “Three Issues”:

1. Ana learns that a childhood friend has died from opiate addiction.
2. Ana struggles with the changes she must make in herself to truly accept the child she’s known for 22 years as her son now as her daughter.
3. The dynamiting of the Bamiyan Buddhas in 2001 by the Taliban.

The aim, I wrote, was to pull the threads between narratives in a way that would deepen opportunities for awe and emotion and wisdom, analogous to an intimate friendship where the story telling provides a platform for reflections that reverberate between speaker and listener.

What I didn’t have for a long time was the structure. At first, I thought the book might be organized around visits to seven different museums, each to view particular paintings with persons important to Ana. After making these visits, I abandoned the idea as too formulaic—committing, instead, to the novel taking place on a single day: Ana’s 60th birthday. An early version of the novel was solely from Ana’s point of view, with the chapters from other characters’ points of view slated for a second book. It wasn’t until it dawned on me that by weaving these two projects together, the reader would be able to understand the events of the book through multiple perspectives that the novel found its shape.

Q: What does Ana’s infidelity say about her, and her relationships with her husband and lover?

A: When Ana confides in her closest friend, Fiona, about her affair, Fiona responds that Henry has “breached the marital contract by abdicating on sexual relations.... your actions are a just amendment.’ Her lover, Lance, similarly justifies his behavior as a result of the irreconcilable differences between what sex means to him—an opportunity for a sense of oneness akin to what he feels as a surfer riding a wave—and what it means to his wife—a pleasure, not unlike what she has eating chocolate. Ana, however, experiences a wrenching conflict between her guilt about betraying her husband, Henry, who she never stops loving, and an honest acknowledgment of the impact the nearly decade of celibacy that has followed his back injury has had on her. In essence, she sacrifices her own self-esteem, which is dependent on being a good spouse, in order to feel more alive—a choice that she questions on her 60th birthday.

Q: ANA TURNS addresses social issues in a way that is unusual in fiction: Kayla Greenwood’s forgiveness of her father’s killer, the Taliban’s dynamiting of the Bamiyan Buddhas, and the transitioning of Ana’s son, Simon, all bring contemporary threads to the story. How did they inform your writing?

A: Margaret Atwood writes, “In the end, we’ll all become stories.” I think this is true of “we” at every order of magnitude. There are stories that impact millions of people, and stories that impact an individual or a single family. I first learned about Kayla Greenwood’s story when I was researching what was happening on the day the novel takes place. In the last hour of April 27, 2017—Kayla Greenwood’s pleas for clemency for Kenneth Williams, the man who killed her father, having come to naught—Williams was executed. What Ana makes of the forgiveness Kayla and her family extend to Williams is a central theme in the novel, as is Ana’s understanding of Lance’s aim in writing about the dynamiting of the Bamiyan Buddhas: not to endorse this act, which didn’t bring a grain of rice to any starving child, but rather to help Westerners understand why Mullah Mohammed Omar made the decision.

Q: Ana is called “a modern-day Mrs. Dalloway,” by Helen Simonson and snippets of their stories overlap throughout the novel. Tell us more about this symbiotic relationship and what you hope readers take away from it.

A: I am a card-carrying member of the fan club for *Mrs. Dalloway*, a perfect example of a “tight-frame” novel: a novel that in a constricted time period conveys an entire life. Within the constraints of a spring day in 1923, we are presented with not only a rich portrait of Clarissa Dalloway—her early loves and aspirations, the dynamics of her marriage, her relationship with her daughter, and, most importantly, her inner world—but a snapshot of London in the wake of both the Spanish flu and World War I. I hoped with *Ana Turns* to similarly show both how the present always contains the past, and that private life is always stamped by the world around us.

Q: Early in the novel we learn that Simon, Ana’s adult child, is planning to transition, and there is great care and thought put into Ana’s response to this news. How did you develop this storyline and, as a mother yourself, how did you identify with it?

A: I knew from the outset that I could not write from the perspective of a trans person. That said, as a parent who has struggled to let go of ingrained ideas about what constitutes a good life and to accept my adult children’s visions for themselves, I thought I could attempt to write from the perspective of a mother struggling with a similar internal journey with an adult child whose transitioning she wants to support.

From memoirs by trans women about their experiences with their families of origin and from friends with nonbinary and trans children, I was aware of the great range of parental responses: what Torrey Peters in her novel *Detransition Baby* describes as “all the classic parents-of-a-trans mistakes” to extreme cruelty and abuse. I hoped to honestly depict a mother as she works through her own feelings of loss and anxiety while trying her best to not impose that process on her child.

Q: Which of Ana’s relationships that are explored in the book do you see as the most fulfilling in her life? The most damaging? Why?

A: One of my favorite aphorisms is by Kundera: “Love is a constant interrogation.” With a mother whose vision of raising children was to make sure they were housed and clothed and fed and survived to age 18, and a father who believed that asking questions of his children was intrusive, Ana is stunned—and at first made uneasy—when she meets her friend Fiona and, not long after, her husband, Henry, by how deeply they want to know her. Something different transpires with her lover: he recognizes parts of her that she’s never known existed, creating between them an almost unbearably powerful intimacy.

Q: The characters in ANA TURNS are richly crafted and deeply considered. Do you have a process in creating a character- is there a backstory to each that doesn’t make it into your books?

A: During the years I was a practicing psychotherapist, I would begin my work with potential new patients with a consultation: a few sessions during which I gathered a great deal of information, yielding a preliminary story line. The treatment proper proceeded in a freer way, guided by what was most powerfully on my patient’s mind and the associations that emerged. The story I’d formed from the consultation, invaluable as it was, was always overthrown by what would emerge. I’ve followed a similar process with my novels: a long period during which I produce sometimes hundreds of pages that include character profiles, setting descriptions, research notes, structure diagrams, plans for the narrative arc—very little of which I ever look at once what I consider the writing begins, and most of which is so transformed, it’s sometimes shocking to look back at those original pages!

Artwork referred to in ANA TURNS

Femme Entre Deux Maisons, Alberto Giacometti: Ana's mother was disappointed that Ana "more closely resembled an androgynous Giacometti, collarbones in lieu of cleavage, that a stolid milkmaid like her Swedish forebears." (p1)



Third century Hellenistic Terra Cotta: Simon and Ana pause to examine this statue when they meet for lunch at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (p83).



The Storm, Auguste Cot: Henry takes Ana to see this painting early in their relationship. “They’re in sync,’ Henry said, ‘their strides perfectly aligned, but at the same time they’re completely separate. The girl is absorbed in her alarm about the storm while the boy is absorbed in her. She’s monitoring the blackening sky. He’s monitoring her. She’s light on the surface and dark on the interior. He’s the reverse.’ (pp90-91)



Yogini Nairatmya: Ana is studying this tiny bejeweled statue at the Rubin Museum when Lance spots her. “I’ve been trying to figure out what’s going on,” she tells him. “She’s sitting on a male figure. And then there’s that chain of tiny skulls...” (p135)



Bamiyan Buddhas: Ana first goes to Lance’s apartment so he can show her the documentary his friend Neil made about the Bamiyan Buddhas: “In a voice-over, Neil explained that the Buddhas are thought to date from the sixth century. The smaller one, standing at 120 feet on the eastern side, is presumed to be Buddha Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha, while the other, on the western side and 175 feet in height, depicts Buddha Vairochana, known as the transcendent Buddha.” (p138)

The photographs below were taken in 1977, 14 years before the Buddhas were dynamited by the Taliban.



Buddha Vairochana



Buddha Shakyamuni

Henry's Kale and Button Mushroom Lasagna

Based on a recipe published in the *Washington Post*

Ingredients

Servings: 8

6 tablespoons unsalted butter
¼ cup flour
2 cups vegetable broth
1 cup milk (whole or reduced fat)
1 teaspoon kosher salt (more as needed)
Freshly ground pepper
1 pound button mushrooms, trimmed and chopped
12 ounces kale (thick ribs removed), cut into thin strips
¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
1 pound whole-milk ricotta
1 large egg
9 ounces no-boil lasagna noodles
2 cups ounces shredded smoked mozzarella
1 cup freshly grated parmesan cheese

Directions

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees with the rack in the middle.

In a medium saucepan over medium heat, melt 4 tablespoons butter. Add the flour, stir to make a smooth paste, and cook, stirring, 1 to 2 minutes. Whisk in the broth and the milk. Bring to a boil, whisking to eliminate lumps. Reduce heat to medium-low and simmer until thickened slightly, about 5 minutes. Season with ¼ teaspoon salt and a few grinds of pepper, taste, and season with more salt and pepper, if needed.

In a large skillet over medium-high heat, melt 1 tablespoon butter. Add mushrooms, ¼ teaspoon salt and a few grinds of the pepper, and cook, stirring and scraping the pan occasionally, until mushrooms begin to brown, about 10 to 12 minutes. Taste, and season with more salt, if needed. Transfer the mixture to a bowl.

Wash the kale thoroughly, leaving the water clinging to the leaves. Return the skillet to medium-high heat and add the remaining 1 tablespoon of butter. When it stops sizzling, add the red pepper flakes and cook, stirring, until fragrant, 30 seconds. Add the kale and the remaining 1/2 teaspoon salt and cook, tossing frequently, until the kale is wilted and very tender, about 10 minutes. You may need to add a few splashes of water along the way if the pan gets dry. Taste, and season with more salt, if needed.

In a small bowl, whisk the ricotta, lemon zest and egg.

To assemble the lasagna, spread half the flour-milk mixture in an even layer on the bottom of a 9-by-13-inch baking dish. Arrange the noodles in an even layer, breaking the noodles to fit as needed. Spread the mushrooms evenly over the noodles and then top with the kale, distributing it evenly. Top with half the smoked mozzarella.

Arrange a second layer of noodles, then top with evenly spaced dollops of the ricotta. Gently spread the ricotta to make an even layer. Add one more layer of noodles, pour over the remaining flour-milk mixture, and finish with the remaining smoked mozzarella. Sprinkle the Parmesan over the top.

Bake 40 to 50 minutes, until the cheese is golden brown and the juices are bubbling around the edges. Let cool for at least 20 minutes before cutting and serving.

