

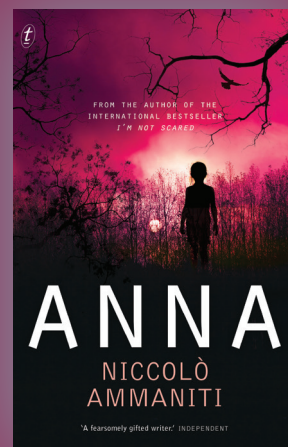
# Anna



## Niccolò Ammaniti

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FICTION, TRADE PAPERBACK

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### PRAISE FOR ANNA

'Ammaniti has created a totally convincing *Lord of the Flies*-esque world and young Anna, endlessly resourceful amid the horror and chaos, is a heroine to root for.' BOOKSELLER

'A post-apocalyptic narrative that brilliantly manipulates the usual models even as it transcends their limits... Ammaniti sets a new standard in post-apocalyptic fiction, while creating a world that, populated by desperate innocents, proves far more frightening than any stock cannibals-in-monster-trucks scenario.' GUARDIAN

'An audacious and elegant post-apocalyptic novel.' MINDFOOD

'As well as conjuring up this excellent characterisation, Ammaniti's prose has a strange, deadpan tenderness that I loved. There is always a sense of hope in the hopelessness. This is a sickeningly wonderful novel, and a perfect example of literary dystopian fiction.' READINGS

'With William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* as its touchstones, this dystopian novel pays homage to resilience and survival against the odds in a climate of violence and superstition. It's also a coming-of-age story about a harsh transition to adulthood, with the added stinger that death waits in the wings.' QANTAS MAGAZINE

### ABOUT NICCOLÒ AMMANITI

Niccolò Ammaniti was born in Rome in 1966. He has written two collections of short stories and six novels, four of which have been translated into English. He was the youngest ever winner of the Italian Viareggio Literary Prize for Fiction for his best-selling novel *I'm Not Scared*, which has been translated into thirty-five languages. *The*

*Crossroads* received the Premio Strega Prize in 2007, Italy's equivalent of the Booker Prize.

### A READER'S INTRODUCTION TO ANNA

Post-apocalyptic fiction brings us back to the most essential questions. Without the trappings of society, how do people behave? What does this tell us about human nature?

In *Anna* there are, of course, only children left to answer these questions. Four years after a virus killed everyone over the age of 14, determined Anna is living with her younger brother on their mother's farm in Sicily. Anna goes foraging for essentials, while keeping her brother from straying with stories of ghosts and monsters. She faces 'monsters' of her own.

As rumours swirl, other desperate children go off in search of the Little Lady and her miraculous curative powers. And Anna and Astro's isolated life is, inevitably, disrupted. A band of children seduce Astro away from the farm, and take him to their base, the hotel where they keep the Little Lady. Here there is a kind of anarchic tyranny, with children savagely surviving and foraging and partying and dying. It is immediately reminiscent of *Lord of the Flies*, yet with distinct differences. Anna goes here too, to find her brother.

Many books would end here, in this re-created society where the moral compass is spinning. But Ammaniti has Anna continue on her journey. Anna, Astro and Pietro strike out on their own, with Fluffy, and with their memories. For Anna the memory is firstly of her mother, whose love for her children is palpable in the book of instructions she leaves for them.

Aiming to reach the Italian mainland where Anna hopes they will find a cure (one she believes will be superior to Pietro's desired shoes), the three children live happily

on the Sicilian coast as Anna and Pietro fall in love, and Astro finds a father figure in Pietro.

But of course there is no happy ending. Pietro dies, and the tell-tale blotches bloom on Anna's body. And Ammaniti leaves us without knowing what happens to Anna and Astro once they reach the mainland.

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### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. 'It was as if someone watching her from above was writing her story, inventing even crueler ways of making her suffer.' (pp. 234) There is, of course, an author writing this story. Why do you think Ammaniti inserts this line? What do you think he was trying to achieve by writing about Anna's suffering? More generally, why do you think he chose a post-apocalyptic scenario to write about?
2. How did you feel reading about Anna's suffering? Did you think that Ammaniti was cruel for giving her Pietro and taking him away?
3. In the same passage as that quoted in Question 1, Anna realises: 'The truth was she was running along a fixed path, like a hamster in a wheel. The idea that she could choose whether to turn right or left was just an illusion'. (pp. 235) How much agency do you think Anna has in this book? Is this generally true of people in life?
4. Seeing her mother's body, Anna realises 'life is just a long succession of periods of waiting—sometimes so short you're not even aware of them, sometimes so long they seem endless. But with or without patience they all have an end'. (pp. 75) Discuss the different ways this is true (or untrue) in the novel. What about in life?
5. Why does Anna decorate her mother's bones? Do you find this grotesque or beautiful? Understandable?
6. Ammaniti writes about the will to live. Anna senses that 'all the creatures on this planet...must live. That is our mission, it has been written in our flesh. We must go on...and even when despairing, maimed or blind, we continue to eat, sleep and swim, struggling against the whirlpool that sucks us down'. (pp. 133) But she immediately loses her certainty. What do you think? Is the will to live a basic instinct in us all? What about in Anna particularly? Do you agree that 'life doesn't belong to us, it passes through us'? (pp. 133)
7. Pietro philosophically observes that dogs too only live until 14. 'In the end, what's important is not how long your life is, but how you live it. If you live it well—to the full—a short life is just as good as a long one' he tells Anna. (pp. 196) Do you agree?
8. What do you make of the spectacle at the hotel of the giant made of bones, lit up by electric light, and with music in the background? Why does Anna think 'only the Grown-ups could do something like this'? (pp. 163) Does the spectacle say something about the will to creativity and artistic expression? Or is it more sinister than that?
9. If you have read *Lord of the Flies*, compare the two books. What are the similarities and differences between the two social structures formed by the abandoned children? What are the similarities and differences between what the two books are saying about society and human nature? What other books does *Anna* remind you of and how is it similar and different?
10. A review in the *Guardian* declares that 'Ammaniti sets a new standard in post-apocalyptic fiction'. Do you agree? Why or why not?
11. *Anna* is being described as literary post-apocalyptic fiction, presumably as opposed to genre, or non-literary. What makes this novel 'literary' and therefore different from other post-apocalyptic fiction?
12. What is Fluffy's role in the story? Does he serve both a narrative and symbolic purpose?
13. What are the parallels between the fable of the boy who swims down to the ocean to hold up Sicily at the bidding of the king and *Anna* the novel? What are the parallels between the boy and Anna the character?
14. What does the octopus represent? It too tries to cling to the bottom of the ocean. Later, it is discarded. Why do you think Anna's capturing of the octopus coincides with her first period?
15. This is also a coming of age novel—Anna gradually becomes aware of her emerging sexuality, she gets her first period. How do the two strands—post-apocalyptic and coming of age—work together in the novel?
16. Is it realistic that Anna would become so concerned with her appearance once she realises how much she loves Pietro?
17. Anna wants to believe she is special, that she will be immune to the Red Fever, even though she dismisses the thought every time it comes into her mind. (pp. 202) Arrogant Patrizio too believed he would be immune, although he is portrayed as terribly self-deluded. Is that desire to believe one is special an innate part of human nature? Do we all want to believe that? If so, are we all right or are we all wrong?
18. Why do you think Ammaniti left the ending of the novel so open? What do you think will happen to Anna and Astro?