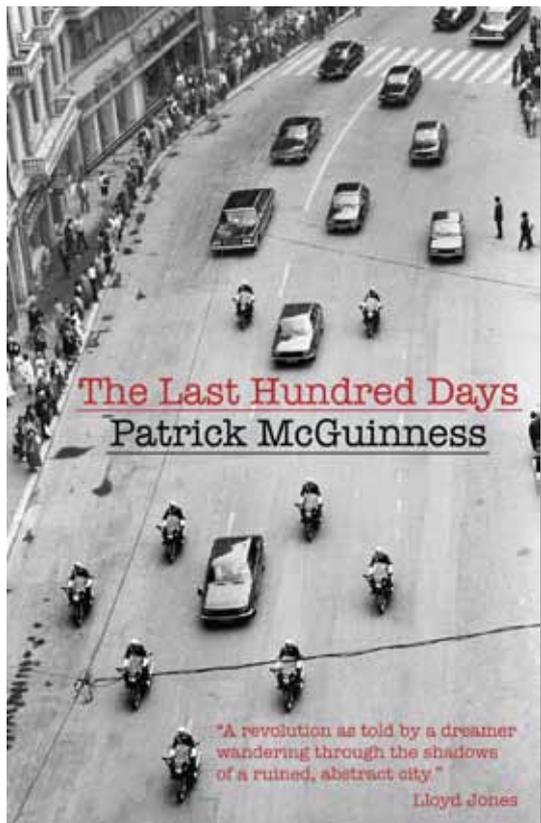




## Reader's Guide



*The Last Hundred Days* is  
Patrick McGuinness' first novel

# The Last Hundred Days Patrick McGuinness

Seren Books  
Price £8.99

[www.themanbookerprize.com](http://www.themanbookerprize.com)



## About the author

Patrick McGuinness was born in Tunisia in 1968 and lived in Bucharest in the years leading up to the Romanian revolution. He is a Professor of French and Comparative Literature at Oxford University and a Fellow of St Anne's College where he has taught since 1998. He now lives between Oxford and North West Wales. His poetry collections include *The Canals of Mars* (2004) and *Jilted City* (2010) which has been just long-listed for the Wales Book of the Year Award 2011 and was a Poetry Book Society Recommendation.

Patrick frequently writes and presents for radio: some of his memorable pieces include *A Short History of Stupidity* and *The Art of Laziness* for BBC Radio 3 and he's also discussed poetry, French culture and his own work as a poet and translator on BBC Radio 3's *Night Waves* and BBC Radio 4's *Women's Hour*.

## The Last Hundred Days

The Romanian revolution of 1989 was the bloodiest and most violent of all the uprisings that marked the end of Communism in Europe. The trial and execution of the dictator Nicolae Ceausescu and his wife Elena on Christmas Day, the street fighting between rebels and the hated Securitate and the pillaging of Ceausescu's luxurious palaces and villas became, along with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the defining images of the end of the Cold War. Set during Ceausescu's last hundred days in power, Patrick McGuinness's accomplished debut explores a world of danger, repression and corruption. When our narrator, a young English student with a damaged past and an uncertain future, arrives in Bucharest he finds himself in a job he never applied for. With duties that become increasingly ambiguous and precarious, he soon finds himself uncomfortably and often dangerously close to the eye of the storm. He learns, as he goes, the uncertainty of friendships in a surveillance society: friendships that are compromised and riddled with danger and duplicity. He encounters dissidents, party apparatchiks, black-marketeers, diplomats, spies and ordinary Romanians, their lives all intertwined against a background of severe poverty and repression as Europe's most paranoid regime plays out its bloody endgame.

## Discussion points

In a recent interview with the *Oxford Times* Patrick McGuinness said about *The Last Hundred Days* "I wanted it to be poetic because that was how I experienced the city and the place and I wanted to get that across, but I'm very conscious that there shouldn't be too much description — that's a well-known problem when poets write novels." Do you think he achieves the right balance?

Why do you think Patrick McGuinness chooses not to give his narrator a name?

Patrick McGuinness, who lived in Bucharest during the revolution, describes himself as 'an obsessive consumer of places'. To what extent do you think Bucharest is the key character in *The Last Hundred Days*?

While this is a novel about a specific place and time, it's also more broadly about how individuals live their lives under a dictatorship, whether they support, acquiesce or resist. Are Patrick McGuinness's characters convincing in their behaviour in the face of totalitarian oppression?

How much comedy did you find in the book, and how much did you enjoy the spy thriller elements of the plot?

## Themed reading

Malcolm Bradbury *Rates of Exchange*  
William Blacker *Along the Enchanted Way*  
Lucian Boia *Romania: Borderland of Europe*  
Fatos Kongoli's *The Loser*  
Milan Kundera *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*

## Useful links

### **Patrick McGuinness' website**

[www.patrickmcguinness.org.uk](http://www.patrickmcguinness.org.uk)

### **Publisher's website**

<http://www.serenbooks.com>

### **Interview with Patrick McGuinness**

[http://www.oxfordtimes.co.uk/leisure/music\\_and\\_books/books/9121780.The\\_Last\\_Hundred\\_Days/](http://www.oxfordtimes.co.uk/leisure/music_and_books/books/9121780.The_Last_Hundred_Days/)