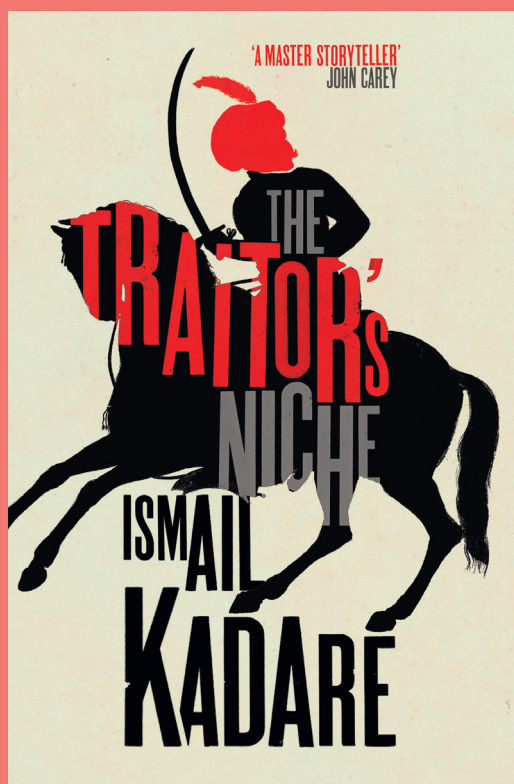


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# Reader's Guide



Other novels by Ismail Kadare  
*The Fall of the Stone City* (2008)  
*A Girl in Exile* (2016)

## The Traitor's Niche Ismail Kadare

Translated by John Hodgson

Harvill Secker

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### About the author

Ismail Kadare, born in 1936 in Albania, is the country's best-known poet and novelist and the winner of the inaugural Man Booker International Prize. Since the appearance of *The General of the Dead Army* in 1965, Kadare has published scores of stories and novels that make up a panorama of Albanian history linked by a constant meditation on the nature and human consequences of dictatorship. His works, particularly *The Monster* and *The Palace of Dreams*, brought him into frequent conflict with the authorities, and in 1990 he sought political asylum in France. He now divides his time between Paris and Tirana.

### About the translator

John Hodgson, born in 1951, taught at the Universities of Pristina and Tirana after studying English literature at Cambridge and Newcastle. He has worked as a translator and interpreter at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in The Hague. He has translated five novels by Ismail Kadare, most recently *The Traitor's Niche*, and several works by Fatos Lubonja, including *Second Sentence* and *The False Apocalypse*. He lives in London.

### About the book

At the heart of the Ottoman Empire, in the main square of Constantinople, a niche is carved into ancient stone. Here, the sultan displays the severed heads of his adversaries. People flock to see the latest head and gossip about the state of the empire: the province of Albania is demanding independence again, and the niche awaits a new trophy.

Tundj Hata, the imperial courier, is charged with transporting heads to the capital – a task he relishes and performs with fervour. But as he travels through obscure and impoverished territories, he makes money from illicit side-shows, offering villagers the spectacle of death. The head of the rebellious Albanian governor would fetch a very high price.

### Discussion points

*The Traitor's Niche* is set in a blood-thirsty Ottoman Empire and was written during the seventies in ultra-communist Albania. Considering this context, how does the book satirize the nature of tyranny, and explore the relationship between individual and state?

Kadare describes a people who have 'come to understand that forgetting was more difficult and complicated than remembering'. Discuss the role of memory in the book.

In the world of the novel, it can take many years for a banned language to be successfully declared extinct: a rare triumph. How does Kadare explore the importance and power of language?

The imperial courier, Tundj Hata, makes a performance out of death when he tours villages with severed heads. Discuss the different ways in which death is present in the novel.

### Themed reading

Elif Şafak *The Architect's Apprentice*  
Jenny White *The Abyssinian Proof*  
Orhan Pamuk *My Name Is Red*