



Agamemnon's Daughter: A Novella and Stories

By Ismail Kadare

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In this spellbinding novel, written in Albania and smuggled into France a few pages at a time in the 1980s, Ismail Kadare denounces with rare force the machinery of a dictatorial regime, drawing us back to the ancient roots of tyranny in Western Civilization. During the waning years of Communism, a young worker for the Albanian state-controlled media agency narrates the story of his ill-fated love for the daughter of a high-ranking official. When he witness the ghostly image of Agamemnon—the Ancient Greek king who sacrificed his own daughter for reasons of State—on the reviewing stand during a May Day celebration, he begins to suspect the full catastrophe of his devotion. Also included are "The Blinding Order," a parable of the Ottoman Empire about the uses of terror in authoritarian regimes, and "The Great Wall," a chilling duet between a Chinese official and a soldier in the invading army of the Tamerlane.

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Agamemnon's Daughter: A Novella and Stories By Ismail Kadare Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1645996 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Arcade Publishing
- Published on: 2006-11-06
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.50" h x 1.00" w x 5.75" l, .84 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 240 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Kadare won the Man Booker International Prize last year for his searing documentation, in numerous works, of Albanian history and politics, particularly life under Communism (*The General of the Dead Army*, etc.). This miscellany contains the title novella, finished in 1985 and published here in English for the first time, and two stories. The novella, a companion to Kadare's *The Successor*, follows one day in the life of a young, unnamed journalist about to attend a celebratory May Day parade (under Communism, a highly charged political function). His "half-girl, half-woman" lover, Suzana, whose father's political star is one the rise, has just left the journalist in a sort of political sacrifice (the journalist is "practically engaged to someone else" and it looks bad). Through a wry and compelling set of ruminations on the grandstand, the journalist finds that a government that would deny young love denies humanity, and seeks the isolation of every citizen—which in turn pits neighbor against neighbor in a fever of paranoid denunciation. That simple but powerful insight also lies behind the two shorter, more allegorical works in the collection, "The Blinding Order" and "The Great Wall," which were completed in 1984 and 1993 respectively. (Nov.)

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From [Booklist](#)

The three tales collected here realize the theme of fear as an instrument of power with consummate art. In the novella "Agamemnon's Daughter," a man takes the anxiety of his lover breaking off with him to the Communist May Day celebration. As he walks to the parade ground, he tries to fathom what his inexplicably good grandstand-seat ticket portends for him and, indeed, for everyone at his government workplace. The fate of Iphigenia, sacrificed by her father so that the Greeks could reach Troy, nags him. Does it pertain to the loss of his lover, daughter of a party bigwig? "The Blinding Order," set in the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire, relates the kind of trickle-down effect the *Agamemnon's Daughter* protagonist fears for his department from the perspective of a young woman whose fiance is appointed a judge responsible for enforcing the sultan's new measures against the evil eye. "The Great Wall" alternates the perspectives of a Chinese construction inspector and a nomad scout on either side of China's famous bulwark as Tamerlane's forces approach. *Ray Olson*

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Review

Kadare brilliantly recreates the atmosphere of shadowy fear, rumours and recrimination in Albania ... a mesmerically readable parable about the abuse of state power * *Observer* * Suffused with the power of thought and feeling ... Above all, Kadare creates a haunting sense of the absurd * *Sunday Times* * Dream and reality melt together, as in Kafka, making it difficult to identify where the nightmares really begin * *Times* *

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Sheri Furlong:

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Jennifer Fountain:

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