



★ **The Aviator**

Eugene Vodolazkin

Lisa Hayden, Translator

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Eugene Vodolazkin's *The Aviator* is an unabashed, panoramic view of the landscape of human consciousness affected by time, place, faith, and faces.

Innokenty Petrovich Platonov does not know who he is. Confined to a bed in a mysterious location and attended only by a Russian German doctor named Geiger and by Nurse Valentina, Innokenty is told to write. Geiger insists that he recall all the important memories on his own. Slowly, the details of his life in the first half of the twentieth century return—his romance with Anastasia Voronina, the Great War, the Bolshevik Revolution, his sentencing to a labor camp. But when he notices the expiration date on a bottle of pills, he realizes that he is now alive in the year 1999, though he has the appearance of someone much younger.

Through Innokenty's journal entries, the mystery of his fate is revealed. Later, Geiger and Anastasia's granddaughter add their own journal entries to this intricate tapestry of history, science, and religion. The brutal reality of the Bolshevik Revolution is painted in the small frame of Innokenty's life, but retains the same (and perhaps greater) force of wider, more grandiose narratives chronicling the upheaval. Lisa Hayden's translation reads beautifully and carries the poignancy well.

In the vein of Dostoyevsky, religion here is not an enemy to be vanquished, but rather a consolation and a means of deciphering the mechanisms of the human mind and the world—seen and unseen. With grace and an attractive gentleness, Innokenty asserts his religious beliefs, and demonstrates his faith's timelessness and enduring relevance. As a man outside his own time, he critiques many of modern society's norms—particularly the obsession with advertising and sensationalist news—indictments that ring even more true in the years beyond 1999.

Draped in thoroughly Russian trappings, *The Aviator* speaks to common experience while soaring into realms that unfold the human drama below.

MEAGAN LOGSDON (May/June 2018)

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