

Eugene Vodolazkin: Russia's prize-winning novelist on main character: 'Laurus brings together several lives of Saints'



Eugene Vodolazkin, one of today's most famous Russian novelist, said that he was inspired by several lives of Saints when creating the main character of his best-selling novel Laurus.

Eugene Vodolazkin and his wife Tatiana recently visited the Saint Nicholas –Tabacu church in Bucharest, the home of the Russian Orthodox Community in the capital of Romania. They met with father Eugeniu Rogoti and spoke about Laurus.

“Laurus is a saint, though largely invented. The path to holiness is a difficult path and it is not accessible to all. Even if Laurus was invented, he is not separated from reality, because he is based on the lives of many Russian and Byzantine Saints,” says Vodolazkin during a recent interview with the Romanian Patriarchate's Lumina Newspaper.

“In this sense, he is a character who brings together several lives of Saints, such as Saint Xenia of Petersburg, Saint Andrew the Fool for Christ, Basil the Blessed and Nicholas Kochanov of Novgorod.”

Since the works of the saints were an inspiration for the novel, the author said that he intended his work to illustrate a particular ideal.

“The saint is a person with a special morality. The ordinary man can only tend towards this. In my book, I show such an ideal, even though my character has, throughout his life, some temptations and trials.”

Eugene Vodolazkin also spoke about the negative media coverage of events today.

“For me Laurus is a special book, because I am not a hagiographer and I did not necessarily intend to describe saints. I describe the world in all its diversity, from saints to criminals. I wrote Laurus because I was very tired of what is being published and shown on TV today.”

“I am convinced that people are not like that and they would pursue beautiful things if they had the opportunity. Therefore, I decided to write a good, beautiful book, in which, even if scenes of cruelty are described, because this is how life is, in the end, an ideal was represented,” says Vodolazkin.

Vodolazkin, who only started writing in his early 40s, burst onto the Russian fiction scene in 2012 with the publication of bestseller Laurus, which has sold over 200,000 copies.

Three of his books have now been translated into English (two of them in 2018) and his melding of the medieval world with a postmodern twist in Laurus prompted some reviewers to compare him to acclaimed Italian novelist Umberto Eco.

A previously unknown academic, he now writes a regular newspaper column, has faced some of Russian most popular television interviewers and appears regularly at events.

The public profile is a far cry from his day job as a scholar of Old Russian texts at St Petersburg’s Institute of Literature (known as Pushkin House), where he has worked for over 30 years.

— Source: basilia.ro / Photography courtesy of Lumina Newspaper