In VN’s novel *Look at the Harlequins!* (1974) Annette Blagovo asks Vadim not to bother her with what Russians call "calf cuddlings:"

In view of the amount of typing to be done, and of her doing it so slowly and badly, she made me promise not to bother her with what Russians call "calf cuddlings" during work. At other times all she allowed me were controlled kisses and flexible holds: our first embrace had been "brutal" she said (having caught on very soon after that in the matter of certain male secrets). She did her best to conceal the melting, the helplessness that overwhelmed her in the natural course of caresses when she would begin to palpitate in my arms before pushing me away with a puritanical frown. Once the back of her hand chanced to brush against the taut front of my trousers; she uttered a chilly "*pardon*" (Fr.), and then went into a sulk upon my saying I hoped she had not hurt herself. (2.8)

The Russian phrase used by Annette is *telyach’yi nezhnosti* (calf cuddlings). In Dostoevski’s novel *Brat’ya Karamazovy* (“Brothers Karamazov,” 1880) Kolya Krasotkin loves his mother very much, but dislikes *telyach’yi nezhnosti*:

Мать ошибалась: маму свою он очень любил, а не любил только "телячьих нежностей", как выражался он на своём школьническом языке.

His mother was mistaken; he was very fond of her. He only disliked “calf cuddlings,” as he expressed it in his schoolboy language. (Part Four, Book X, chapter 1)

In 1867 Dostoevski (whose first wife died three years ago) married his stenographer Anna Snitkin. Vadim marries his typist, Annette Blagovo, four years after his first wife’s death. Iris Black (Vadim’s first wife) is English and does not read Russian. In Chapter Three (XXVII) of *Eugene Onegin* Pushkin says that he knows that some would make ladies read Russian and wonders if he can imagine them *s Blagonamerennym v rukakh* (with the *Well-Meaner* in their hands):

Я знаю: дам хотят заставить
Читать по-русски. Право, страх!
Могу ли их себе представить
С «Благонамеренным» 21 в руках!
Я шлюсь на вас, мои поэты;
Не правда ль: милые предметы,
Которым, за свои грехи,
Писали втайне вы стихи,
Которым сердце посвящали,
Не все ли, русским языком
Владея слабо и с трудом,
Его так мило искажали,
И в их устах язык чужой

Не обратился ли в родной?

I know: some would make ladies

read Russian. Horrible indeed!

Can I image them

with *The Well-Meaner*21 in their hands?

My poets, I appeal to you!

Is it not true that the sweet objects

for whom, to expiate your sins,

in secret you wrote verses,

to whom your hearts you dedicated —

did not they all, wielding the Russian language

poorly, and with difficulty,

so sweetly garble it,

and on their lips did not a foreign language

become a native one?

21. A periodical that used to be conducted by the late A. Izmaylov rather negligently. He once apologized in print to the public, saying that during the holidays he had “gone on a spree.” (Pushkin’s note)

In a letter of July 26, 1828, to Pushkin Vyazemski quotes the words of his neighbor who thought that *blagonamerennyi* (the well-meaner) was an euphemism and that Pushkin was slipping into the hands of ladies what we have between legs:

Но всего лучше то, qu'il entend malice à votre vers: С благонамеренным в руках и полагает, что ты суёшь в руки дамские то, что у нас между ног.

In a letter of Sept. 1, 1828, to Vyazemski Pushkin compares his *Blagonamerennyi* (i. e. his male organ) to its *pechatnyi tyozka* (press namesake): *namerenie* (the intention) is *blagoe* (good), but the performance is poor:

Я пустился в свет, потому что бесприютен. Если б не [Закревская] твоя медная Венера, то я бы с тоски умер. Но она утешительно смешна и мила. Я ей пишу стихи. А она произвела меня в свои сводники (к чему влекли меня и всегдашняя склонность и нынешнее состоянье моего Благонамеренного, о коем можно сказать то же, что было сказано о его печатном тёзке: ей-ей намерение благое, да исполнение плохое).

According to Vadim, his first tryst with Annette was a flop:

I do not mind recalling that our first tryst was a flop. It took me so long to persuade her that this was the day, and she made such a fuss about which ultimate inch of clothing could be removed and which parts of her body Venus, the Virgin, and the *maire* of our *arrondissement* allowed to be touched, that by the time I had her in a passably convenient position of surrender, I was an impotent wreck. We were lying naked, in a loose clinch. Presently her mouth opened against mine in her first free kiss. I regained my vigor. I hastened to possess her. She exclaimed I was disgustingly hurting her and with a vigorous wriggle expulsed the blooded and thrashing fish. When I tried to close her fingers around it in humble substitution, she snatched her hand away, calling me a dirty *débauché* (*gryaznyy razvratnik*). I had to demonstrate myself the messy act while she looked on in amazement and sorrow. (2.8)

“Venus, the Virgin,” brings to mind *tvoya mednaya Venera* (“your Bronze Venus”), as in a letter to Vyazemski Pushkin calls Agrafena Zakrevskaya (see the quote above). In the same letter of Sept. 1, 1828, Pushkin says that he is *bespriyuten* (“homeless;” see the quote above). The allusion is Priyutino, the Olenins’ country seat some twenty-five miles east of St. Petersburg. Some time in the winter of 1828-29 Pushkin proposed to Annette Olenin and was refused (see my previous post “Annette Blagovo, Ninel Langley, Dora & Dr Olga Repnin in LATH”). Btw., Vadim’s wife Annette says that Ninel Langley is “a veritable angel” (3.1). In his poem *Predchuvstvie* (“Foreboding,” 1828) Pushkin calls Annette Olenin *angel krotkiy,* *bezmyatezhnyi* (“the gentle, serene angel”):

Ангел кроткий, безмятежный,

Тихо молви мне: прости,

Опечалься: взор свой нежный

Подыми иль опусти;

И твоё воспоминанье

Заменит душе моей

Силу, гордость, упованье

И отвагу юных дней.

*Krotkaya* (“A Gentle Creature,” 1876) is a story by Dostoevski.

Alexey Sklyarenko