The characters in VN’s novel *Look at the Harlequins!* (1974) include Annette Blagovo (Vadim’s second wife) and her friend Ninel Ilinishna Langley, “a displaced person in more senses than one” (3.1). Ninel is Lenin written backward. There is Lenin in Olenin. In his EO Commentary (vol. III, p. 206) VN points out that anagrams in French of “Annette Olénine” blossom here and there in the margins of Pushkin’s manuscripts. One finds it written backward in the drafts of *Poltava* (2371, f. 11V; first half of October, 1828): *ettenna eninelo*; and the earnestness of his hopes is reflected in "Annette Pouchkine" jotted among the drafts of the first canto of *Poltava*, apparently on the very day that the repentant letter about the Gabriel poem was written to the tsar.

Some time in the winter of 1828-29 Pushkin proposed to Annette Olenin and was refused.

There is *blago* (good) in Blagovo. In his last verses Vladimir Lenski (a character in Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin*) uses the phrase *vsyo blago* (all is right) and repeats the word *blagosloven* (blest) twice:

Стихи на случай сохранились,  
Я их имею; вот они:  
«Куда, куда вы удалились,  
Весны моей златые дни?  
Что день грядущий мне готовит?  
Его мой взор напрасно ловит,  
В глубокой мгле таится он.  
Нет нужды: прав судьбы закон.  
Паду ли я, стрелой пронзенный,  
Иль мимо пролетит она,  
Всё **благо**: бдения и сна  
Приходит час определенный;  
**Благословен** и день забот,  
**Благословен** и тьмы приход!

The verses chanced to be preserved;

I have them; here they are:

Whither, ah! whither are ye fled,

my springtime's golden days?

“What has the coming day in store for me?

In vain my gaze attempts to grasp it;

in deep gloom it lies hidden.

It matters not; fate's law is just.

Whether I fall, pierced by the dart, or whether

it flies by — all is right:

of waking and of sleep

comes the determined hour;

blest is the day of cares,

blest, too, is the advent of darkness! (Six: XXI)

The last word in Lenski’s last poem is *suprug* (spouse):

Сердечный друг, желанный друг,  
Приди, приди: я твой супруг!..»

Friend of my heart, desired friend, come,

come: I'm thy spouse!” (Six: XXI: 13-14)

In Pushkin’s *Stsena iz Fausta* (“A Scene from Faust,” 1825) Faust says that *sochetanie dvukh dush* (the mingling of two souls) is *pryamoe blago* (a real blessing):

В глубоком знанье жизни нет —  
Я проклял знаний ложный свет,  
А слава... луч её случайный  
Неуловим. Мирская честь  
Бессмысленна, как сон... Но есть  
Прямое благо: сочетанье  
Двух душ...

In that deep knowledge nothing lives;

I curse the false light that it gives,

And as for fame, its random lustre

Soon fades away. Senseless as dreams

Are wordly honors. There is, it seems,

But one real blessing: the mingling of

Two souls.

(tr. Alan Shaw)

and Mephistopheles compares himself to an harlequin:

Но — помнится — тогда со скуки,  
Как арлекина, из огня  
Ты вызвал наконец меня.

But, as far as I recall, you were so bored,

That like a harlequin from the fire

You finally conjured me up?

In his poem *To Dawe, Esqr.* (1828) Pushkin mentions Mephistopheles and fair Olenin’s features:

Зачем твой дивный карандаш  
Рисует мой арапский профиль?  
Хоть ты векам его предашь,  
Его освищет Мефистофель.

Рисуй Олениной черты.  
В жару сердечных вдохновений,  
Лишь юности и красоты  
Поклонником быть должен гений.

Why draw with your pencil sublime

My Negro profile? Though transmitted

By you it be to future time,

It will be by Mephisto twitted.

Draw fair Olenin's features, in the glow

Of heart-engendered inspiration:

Only on youth and beauty should bestow

A genius its adoration.

(VN’s translation)

There is Dora in “adoration.” In the last line of his poem “On Translating *Eugene Onegin*” (1955) VN calls his translation of EO “dove-droppings on your [Pushkin’s] monument.” In Leningrad Vadim meets Dora (a friend of Vadim’s and Annette’s daughter Bel) near the monument of Pushkin:

Dora was to meet me Friday morning on the Square of the Arts in front of the Russian Museum near the statue of Pushkin erected some ten years before by a committee of weathermen. An Intourist folder had yielded a tinted photograph of the spot. The meteorological associations of the monument predominated over its cultural ones. Frock-coated Pushkin, the right-side lap of his garment permanently agitated by the Nevan breeze rather than by the violence of lyrical afflatus, stands looking upward and to the left while his right hand is stretched out the other way, sidewise, to test the rain (a very natural attitude at the time lilacs bloom in the Leningrad parks). It had dwindled, when I arrived, to a warm drizzle, a mere murmur in the lindens above the long garden benches. (5.2)

The meteorological associations play an important role in Pushkin’s poetry. It seems that Pushkin’s poem *Predchuvstvie* (“Foreboding,” 1828), beginning “Again dark clouds above me gathered in silence, jealous destiny with troubles again threatens me,” is addressed to Annette Olenin (whom Pushkin calls “angel”):

Снова тучи надо мною

Собралися в тишине;

Рок завистливый бедою

Угрожает снова мне...

Сохраню ль к судьбе презренье?

Понесу ль навстречу ей

Непреклонность и терпенье

Гордой юности моей?

Бурной жизнью утомленный,

Равнодушно бури жду:

Может быть, ещё спасенный,

Снова пристань я найду...

Но, предчувствуя разлуку,

Неизбежный, грозный час,

Сжать твою, мой ангел, руку

Я спешу в последний раз.

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.

Annette Blagovo and Ninel Langley die in a hurricane:

The mad scholar in *Esmeralda and her Parandrus* wreathes Botticelli and Shakespeare together by having Primavera end as Ophelia with all her flowers. The loquacious lady in *Dr. Olga Repnin* remarks that tornadoes and floods are really sensational only in North America. On May 17, 1953, several papers printed a photograph of a family, complete with birdcage, phonograph, and other valuable possessions, riding it out on the roof of their shack in the middle of Rosedale Lake. Other papers carried the picture of a small Ford caught in the upper branches of an intrepid tree with a man, a Mr. Byrd, whom Horace Peppermill said he knew, still in the driver’s seat, stunned, bruised, but alive. A prominent personality in the Weather Bureau was accused of criminally delayed forecasts. A group of fifteen schoolchildren who had been taken to see a collection of stuffed animals donated by Mrs. Rosenthal, the benefactor’s widow, to the Rosedale Museum, were safe in the sudden darkness of that sturdy building when the twister struck. But the prettiest lakeside cottage got swept away, and the drowned bodies of its two occupants were never retrieved. (4.2)

Vadim’s novel *Dr. Olga Repnin* (1946) corresponds to VN’s *Pnin* (1957). In Pushkin’s EO Olga Larin (Tatiana’s younger sister) is Lenski’s sweetheart. In Chapter Three (V: 8-9) of EO Onegin tells Lenski that in Olga’s features there is no life, just as in a Vandyke Madonna. *Madona* (1830) is a sonnet by Pushkin addressed to his wife Natalia Goncharov:

Не множеством картин старинных мастеров  
Украсить я всегда желал свою обитель,  
Чтоб суеверно им дивился посетитель,  
Внимая важному сужденью знатоков.

В простом углу моём, средь медленных трудов,  
Одной картины я желал быть вечно зритель,  
Одной: чтоб на меня с холста, как с облаков,  
Пречистая и наш божественный спаситель —

Она с величием, он с разумом в очах —  
Взирали, кроткие, во славе и в лучах,  
Одни, без ангелов, под пальмою Сиона.

Исполнились мои желания. Творец  
Тебя мне ниспослал, тебя, моя Мадона,  
Чистейшей прелести чистейший образец.

I’ve never wished to decorate my mean abode  
With rows and rows of fine and celebrated pictures,  
To draw from guests some fawning, superstitious rictures,  
Attending as the experts’ clever views have flowed.

No, in the simple corner where my labour’s done,  
I’ve only ever wanted but one painted witness,  
And only one: as from the heavens, so from canvas,  
The Virgin pure, presenting her beloved Son –

Majestic, she, and he with wisdom in his eyes –  
There calmly watch in glory, under radiant skies,  
Alone in Zion, with no angels in attendance.

They are enough for me. Madonna, you have been  
Revealed to me by God Almighty’s sweet transcendence,  
The purest model, of the purest joy the queen.

(tr. R. Moreton)

Alexey Sklyarenko