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THE BACCHAE AND THE MASTER & MARGARITA

A supernatural figure arrives in the city disguised as a mortal. He confronts a city official, who does not believe in the supernatural. They argue, but the official refuses to believe in the supernatural nature of his interlocutor (though because of the stranger's disguise, he does not realize it is he they are discussing). Instead he decides to have the stranger arrested. The attempt at arrest fails and in the end the official is decapitated.

The plot of the first three chapters of Bulgakov's Master and Margarita? Yes. But it is also the plot of Euripides' Bacchae. Extensive work has been done on Bulgakov's sources, historical and literary: from the obvious canonical and apocryphal gospels, Roman historians, the Talmud, Goethe's and Gounod's Faust, Renan, Farrar, Strauss, and the Brokgauz-Efron encyclopedia to contemporary plays, the philosophy of Skovoroda and the obscure Provençal song of the Albigenian Crusade (Galinskaia 1986). While it would be absurd to claim that the Bacchae provides the sole key to unlocking the meaning of Bulgakov's novel, it does seem to illuminate some corners. And the parallels are not necessarily intentional, though one may assume Bulgakov, as an educated man of the theater, knew Euripides. Rather a close comparison simply provides more grist for the already overloaded mill of Bulgakovedenie.

The Bacchae opens with Dionysus' monologue: he comes from the East, from Lydia and Phrygia, where his religion is already established, to establish it in Hellas first in Thebes, the city of his ancestors. He has changed his shape from god to mortal and does not reveal his name to the other characters until the end of the play; until then he is referred to as xénos, "stranger" or "foreigner." In the first stichomythia between Pentheus and Dionysus, Pentheus first asks the stranger's national origin (460¹). He claims to be from Lydia

¹Line number references are to the Oxford text edited by Dodds: Euripides 1960; translations are the author's.

(464). Like Dionysus, Woland arrives on the scene disguised as a mortal and a foreigner. His nationality is more ambiguous than Dionysus', though equally intriguing to Berlioz and Bezdomnyi: they think he is German, English, French, Polish, not a foreigner, a foreigner, and a Russian emigré before he finally accepts their designation of him as a German: "Yes, if you like, a German" (434²). And we do not learn Woland's name until after Berlioz's death, when he has already appeared to Stepa Likhodeev with the intention of occupying Berlioz's apartment.

While on the vertical axis both Woland and Dionysus come from the world of the immortals, in the horizontal plane they claim to come from different directions. Dionysus' arrival from the East may have historical foundation in the importation of his rites by missionaries from the East, the usual source of mystical religious enlightenment. Woland claims to come from the usual source of enlightenment in Russia: the West. Another difference is that Dionysus is in fact not a foreigner, but a native of Thebes, and Pentheus is his cousin. Perhaps, however, this is not Woland's first visit to Moscow either: he can speak Russian without an accent, and he claims the purpose of his theatrical appearance is to find out whether the population of Moscow has changed, which implies he knew how they were (537-8).

Woland and Dionysus share the gift of prophecy. Woland's prediction of the manner and causes of Berlioz's death, though couched in the language of astrology, is explainable only as divine foresight (432-33). Only later does the reader (and then Bezdomnyi) piece together the significance of Annushka's buying and spilling the sunflower seed oil (433). Dionysus employs the same riddling device, when he tells Pentheus he will be "carried home in his mother's arms" (968-69), to which the unsuspecting Pentheus responds that he will "get what he deserves" (970). Here the audience, which knows the myth already, shudders at Pentheus' blindness to the ambiguity of his own language. Both Woland and

²References are to the 1978 edition: Bulgakov 1978; translations are the author's.

Dionysus, then, use their mantic gifts to predict the deaths of their opponents in language the latter fail to understand.³ In the Bacchae it is appropriately the seer Teiresias who praises Dionysus for his gift of prophecy: "this is a god of prophecy: the Bacchic worshipers, though manic, are filled with mantic power; when the god enters the body he makes the maddened tell the future" (298-301).⁴

In the Bacchae the rationalist tyrant Pentheus refuses to accept Dionysus as a god. When the stranger tells him he was initiated by Dionysus, son of Zeus, Pentheus asks, "Is there a Zeus there who gives birth to new gods?" (467) The stranger responds that it was the same Zeus who wedded Semele here in Thebes (469). According to the myth, Semele was slain through Hera's jealousy: Hera suggested Semele ask Zeus to appear to her in his true form, with disastrous results--Semele was killed by his thunderbolts and her tomb still smolders. The Thebans held that Semele was destroyed for her false claim that she was loved by Zeus (244-45). Pentheus, like his Theban subjects then, claims the being we know to be divine is a mere mortal. Berlioz, like the rest of the Muscovite atheists, also denies the existence of God and, by implication, of the Devil (though it is actually Bezdomnyi who responds to Woland's question, "And the Devil doesn't exist either?" (461)).

Here the plots diverge: Pentheus asserts the divine figure is a mere mortal; Berlioz denies his existence altogether. It is instead the supernatural Woland who presents the story of another supernatural figure--Ieshua--as a mortal. Berlioz argues against the historical mortality of Christ, claiming instead that all of the stories about him are myth: "This Jesus as a person never existed at all in the world... and all the stories about him are merely inventions, the most ordinary myth" (425). Some critics go to great lengths to make out both Euripides' and Bulgakov's works as atheist--or at least rationalist--tracts. El'baum presents Woland's story of a mortal Christ as Bulgakov's contribution to the polemic of the historical school against the mythological school, represented by Berlioz

³In Bulgakov, Korov'ev later correctly predicts the death of Fokich (625, 808).

⁴In Bulgakov Ieshua too predicts the future, but his gift is minimized: he only predicts the weather (441).

(El'baum 1981). Verrall and Norwood claim Euripides is making a similar rationalist argument, that the miracles were "a hoax perpetrated on the Thebans by the Stranger, who is not Dionysus at all, but a charlatan possessed of hypnotic powers" (Segal 1982: 219⁵). Similarly, the general conclusion of the investigation in Moscow is that Korov'ev was a master hypnotist. But the penalty for such a rationalist interpretation is clear from the black magic seance, presided over by Woland: Bulgakov's master of ceremonies suggests the performance is merely an instance of mass hypnosis (540)--for which lie he has his head torn off. The Moscow novel only makes sense if we accept Woland's actions as the real intervention of the supernatural. The Bacchae only makes sense if we accept the palace miracles shown on stage as real. Pentheus' failure to accept these miracles leads to his being torn apart during the play as Bengalskii's failure to accept the supernatural leads to his decapitation on stage. In the case of the Bacchae, the rationalist interpretation is now discredited, among other reasons because all the manuscripts name the stranger as Dionysus. The text of the Bacchae allows no room for interpreting Dionysus as a fiction. The text of the Master and Margarita allows no room for interpreting the Jerusalem novel as a historical fact. Even within Bulgakov's novel it is presented as 1) a story told by the Devil (the Gospel according to Woland), 2) Ivan Bezdomnyi's dream, and 3) the Master's novel about Pilate. Can we then accept El'baum's conclusion that the so-called "historical part of Master and Margarita is no less than a reconstruction of a real episode which took place in Judea at the beginning of the first century" (El'baum 1981: 123)? Is Woland then real too?

Berlioz adduces a number of examples to show that the Christians "didn't invent anything new" (426). Of those he cites, Osiris, Tammuz, and Adonis are all fertility/vegetation gods associated with cycles of death and resurrection like both Christ and Dionysus. Berlioz mentions the Phrygian Attis as a "son of god," like Christ (427), but Attis' nationality and representation as an

⁵see Norwood 1908 and Verrall 1967. For criticism of their interpretation see Winnington-Ingram 1969: 182-85 and Dodds 1960: xlviil.

effeminate youth also recall Dionysus. And what of the parallels between Dionysus himself and Christ?

At the center of Dionysiac ritual were the tearing apart (sparagmos) and eating raw (omophagia) of a ritual victim. On the one hand, this was interpreted as commemoration of the day when "the infant Dionysus was himself torn to pieces and devoured" (Dodds 1960: xvii). But the god was also present in his victim and devouring the victim's flesh eliminated the boundary between god and worshipper. Most sacrifices establish the boundaries between raw and cooked, nature and civilization, god and man.⁶ Dionysiac sparagmos and omophagia, on the other hand, dissolve these boundaries: the ritual is performed in the wild with no weapons, the flesh is eaten raw, and the celebrant is inhabited by the god (becoming entheos, from which comes our word "enthusiasm").⁷ The Christian sacraments are a more traditional sacrifice: the literal death of the victim is distanced, communion with the divinity being accomplished with "cooked" bread and wine.⁸ In the Bacchae Teiresias credits Dionysus with the gift of wine, which he pairs with Demeter's dry food (272-285). Of course Dionysus' wine is more than just a "rest from grief" as Teiresias calls it, and unlike the Christian sacrament, it is ambivalent and dangerous: wine too leads to dissolution of boundaries in Dionysiac ecstasy. We will return to the sacrament of wine in Bulgakov in a moment.

⁶See the works of the French Structuralists Vernant and Detienne on Greek sacrifice: Detienne and Vernant 1989, Detienne 1979, Vernant 1988, Detienne 1977. Through sacrifice mortal man establishes contact with the immortal gods, though the sacrifice itself points up the structural differences between them. The gods enjoy the immaterial savor of the meat, while mortal man eats the roasted corruptible flesh. At the same time sacrifice establishes the boundary between man (culture), who cooks his food and uses tools, and beast (nature), which eats food raw.

⁷The peculiarities of Dionysiac sacrifice are dealt with at length in Segal 1982; see esp. Ch 2: Forms of Dionysus: Doubling, Hunting, Rituals.

⁸Though distanced, the death of Christ is clearly commemorated and symbolically recreated in the liturgy. The altar represents, among other things, the tomb; at times relics were required for an altar to be consecrated. Jan Kott points out that the bread and wine of the sacrament themselves undergo dismemberment (crushing) and symbolic death (putrefaction in fermentation) to become food and drink (Kott 1970).

For the other Christian sacrament, bread, Berlioz cites the Aztec god Vitzilopochtli. In fact, it is when he is telling Bezdomnyi about how the Aztecs molded figures of Vitzilopochtli out of dough that Woland appears (426). But according to Frazer Vitzilopochtli or Huitzilopochtli was also impersonated by a man who was killed at the end of the year. The ritual took place in May, he was beheaded and his head placed on a spike (Frazer 1914: 280-81⁹). The motif of decapitation again brings us full circle from Berlioz through mythology to Pentheus.

In Euripides' play both Pentheus and Dionysus came to be related to Christ. The 12th century Christus Patiens borrows heavily from the Bacchae, adapting it to the story of Christ's passion. Since the surviving manuscripts of the Bacchae are incomplete, the text has been reconstructed with some material from this later Christian passion play which transposes the role of Pentheus into that of Christ (Dodds: 1960: lvf., 58f., 234f., 245). Like Christ and like a typical scapegoat, Pentheus is led ritually garbed in procession through the city to his death. Pentheus dies on a tree; Christ dies on a cross. Pentheus, who begins by interrogating Dionysus, is eventually converted by him, and his excessive sufferings may win the audience's sympathy by the end of the play. Bulgakov's Jerusalem novel likewise shifts the reader's sympathies to Pilat, who begins as an interrogating authority figure. Margarita, at any rate, finds his punishment too severe: "Twelve thousand moons for one moon long ago, isn't it too much?" (797) Pilat too is converted to the religion of his intended victim, though his conversion is concealed, and it is accomplished without recourse to demonic possession.

On the other hand, scholars have pointed out that "by the figure of Dionysus before Pentheus [the Christian reader] might even--half afraid of blasphemy--be reminded of Christ before Pilate" (Winnington-Ingram 1969: 4). Given the Dionysiac dissolution of boundaries, it is no accident that Pentheus and Dionysus are both

⁹Kott (1970: 314 N. 16) quotes Jung on Huitzilopochtli, connecting him with both Christian and Dionysiac ritual (Jung 1958: 170). Sokolov notes that Huitzilopochtli also figured in some German Faust legends (Bulgakov 1989: 496).

associated with Christ: the god and his victim, active and passive are interchangeable.¹⁰ This shift from hunter to quarry and from active to passive is played on by Euripides in the language as well: Dionysus says to Pentheus, "Perhaps you will catch them, if you are not caught yourself first" (960). Later the messenger describes Pentheus on the top of the pine tree as "more seen by the Maenads than seeing them" (1075). According to some scholars, Pentheus (which means "grief," "suffering") was originally a name of the god himself (Freidenberg 1978: 332; Kerényi 1976: 70). Bulgakov presents an inversion of Pentheus' shift from active spectator to passive spectacle. Woland performs his magic show in a theater. He is on stage. But he later claims he organized the performance because he wanted to see the Muscovites en masse, and the theater was the best place to arrange it: spectacle becomes spectator as Woland sits passively in his armchair while the audience acts out various trials. The "unmasking" or "revealing" (*razoblachenie*) promised in the program takes place, but its object is the audience. First their petty vices are revealed, then the greedy women who exchange their clothes for foreign fashions are literally and embarrassingly revealed on the streets of Moscow when their new clothes vanish into thin air. Let us not forget that Dionysus is god of the mask and the theater. The god arrives disguised as a mortal, but he also dresses Pentheus in a maenad's costume to embarrass him and lead him to his death.

But let us return to the initial stichomythia between Dionysus and Pentheus, in which the position of the compliant passive god in custody of the king reminds one of Christ before Pilate or Ieshua before Pilat. In Euripides, Dionysus' calm is repeatedly contrasted to Pentheus' excitable anger.¹¹ The same can be said of Ieshua and Pilat. Ieshua's calm seems eerie in contrast to his interrogator, who raises his voice and shows other signs of hatred and anger (447-9). Pentheus asks whether the stranger became an initiate asleep or "through his eyes." "Face to face," responds the stranger (470). Here

¹⁰Kott points out the same kind of active-passive role in the Christian sacrament: both the sacrificer and the sacrifice represent Christ when the priest says "This is my body" (Kott 1970: 208).

¹¹435ff., 622, 636 vs. 214, 647, 670f., 798f.; see Dodds 1960: 120f., 154.

it is not Christ or Ieshua, but Woland, whose calm also contrasts sharply with the excitability of his interrogators, who provides the parallel. He surprises Berlioz and Bezdomnyi by insisting he was an eyewitness to the sentencing of Ieshua: "The point is that I was present in person for all of this. I was on Pontii Pilat's balcony, and in the garden while he spoke to Kaifa, and on the dais" (460).

Clearly the parallels between Woland and Dionysus, and between Berlioz and Pentheus are the most obvious. Dionysus has a connection with the pre-Christian underworld. Heraclitus goes so far as to say that Hades and Dionysus are "the same" (22 B15 DK).¹² For the Greeks, "to see the light" meant to be alive, while "darkness" meant death.¹³ Dionysus' imprisonment in a dark place is a symbolic death.¹⁴ But darkness, as Pentheus points out, is Dionysus' natural element as well (485 and esp. 509-510). Of course Pentheus interprets Dionysus' preference for darkness like a puritanical adolescent, projecting onto his enemy his own repressed sexual fantasies. The real Dionysus represents the liberation of women, but their rites are in fact chaste, as the messenger points out (686-88). Woland too assists in the liberation of Natasha and Margarita. There is much female nudity, but no sex in the novel. Margarita, at first something of a prude like Pentheus, expects the foreigner wants more from her than company: she calls Azazello a street pimp (641) and expects she will have to give herself to the foreigner, but Azazello undeceives her (642). Yet both Dionysus and Woland express their disapproval of men who avoid pleasure altogether. The chorus in its first stasimon says that Dionysus gives the joy of wine, but "hates anyone who does not care to live his life to the end blessed by day and happy darkness" (424-26). Dodds comments on this line that "Dionysus is the dispenser of natural joys, Pentheus the joy-hating Puritan" (Dodds 1960: 128). After Fokich has declined his offer of wine and games, Woland comments, "It's altogether bad,

¹²quoted in Segal 1982: 125.

¹³Il. 18.61, Od. 4.540 vs. Il. 4.461.

¹⁴On the equivalence of imprisonment and death see Freidenberg. Kott points out that darkness, thunder, and earthquake accompany the death and resurrection of both Christ and Dionysus (1970: 217).

there's something not good, if you will, hidden in men who avoid wine, games, the company of charming women, a conversation over food and drinks" (624).

Dionysus threatens Theban social structure because he causes the women to revolt, leaving their proper place in the home. Even early tablets refer to Dionysus as Eleuther, the Liberator, corresponding to the Liber Pater of the Romans (Kerényi 1976: 69). Bulgakov's novel also presents two women who leave their homes to serve Woland: Margarita and her maid, Natasha. Obviously the novel presented a political threat in the Soviet Union. Even when it was published, some cuts were made in the first publication to make it more tame both sexually and politically. Margarita's comment that she is expected to "give herself" to the foreigner, for example, was cut (Bulgakov 1969: 288). The numerous politically motivated cuts need not be rehashed here, but, for example, Margarita's joyful cry of "Invisible and free! Invisible and free!" was emended to "Invisible! Invisible!" (Bulgakov 1969: 298) Before Margarita arrives at the ball (where the guests drink and dance) she visits a hilly woods far from Moscow where rusalki (Russian water nymphs) dance to the music of an orchestra of frogs (662). There Margarita is attended by "someone with goat legs" (662-3), who serves her champagne and arranges for transportation back to Moscow. Dionysus' rites include mountain dancing (oreibasia) and he is closely associated with Pan and with satyrs, beings often conceived of as having goat-like features.¹⁵ Not only do the maenads tear herds of cattle apart, they fight the men and pillage the villages (734-68). Dionysus destroys Pentheus' palace by earthquake and fire. In Bulgakov's novel Margarita destroys Latunskii's apartment (651-56), and Woland and his gang destroy several apartments and state buildings by fire.

If we examine the deaths of Pentheus and Berlioz, they too will be found remarkably similar in some details. Pentheus goes to the

¹⁵Dionysus is god of tragedy. Tragedic competitions involved a trilogy of tragedies followed by a satyr play. The word tragedy itself was often interpreted as "goat song" (from tragos "goat" and ôidê "song"). The etymology is now highly suspect, and satyrs seem to have more features of horses than of goats (Braginskaia 1988: 303-9).

mountains to spy on the women's rites. He becomes the victim, torn apart by his mother Agave, his death cry drowned amid the triumphal yells of the Theban maenads (1133). Agave impales his head upon her thyrsus. Berlioz's head is severed from his body by the tram, but, as Woland predicts, he is killed by a komsomolka, the driver is a woman, and his death is accompanied by women's screams: "Berlioz did not cry out, but around him the whole street began to shriek with women's voices" (463). The fragments of Pentheus' body are found with difficulty by Cadmus and brought back on a bier to Thebes (1139, 1216-21), the head borne separately by Agave. Shortly after his death, Berlioz's body also lies in pieces: "Far, far from Griboedov, in a huge hall illuminated by thousand-candle lamps, on three zinc tables lay what until recently had been Mikhail Aleksandrovich" (475). At this point the head is still present, but it disappears before the funeral: Margarita sees the funeral procession of the body only, and Azazello suggests that Begemot is responsible for the theft of the head from the coffin (639). Berlioz's head appears on a platter held by Azazello at Woland's ball (688). The body in the final version of the novel appears not to have been dismembered, even if it is lying on three tables. But an earlier variant had Woland predict Berlioz would be quartered (Bulgakov 1989: 391), and such is the death still described by Korov'ev to Poplavskii: "Off comes the head! Right leg--crunch!--in half, left--crunch!--in half" (615).

Pentheus' death takes place outside the city, Berlioz is killed in a park. The connection between the woods and a vegetation god is only logical. Freidenberg points this out: "as a setting the "garden" will remain the location of love trysts, sex, or death of the vegetation gods" (Freidenberg 1936: 230). This idea brings us to the importance of Gethsemane in the Christ story: while not killed, he is taken prisoner there. In the Jerusalem novel in Master and Margarita Gethsemane is designated as the place where Iuda is to meet his lover Niza; instead he is killed.¹⁶

¹⁶ Niza's name, by the way, could be a transcription of Nysa, a mountain sacred to Dionysus, which appears in the Bacchae (556). In fact, Dionysus' name may be derived from Dios-nysos, perhaps meaning "son of Zeus" (Otto 1965: 61).

Aside from Berlioz and the master of ceremonies Bengalskii, Bulgakov describes a third character who suffers a fate like that of Pentheus: Baron Maigel'. Like Pentheus, Maigel' is a spy, and he dies in part for his excessive curiosity. Pentheus suffers the first part of Dionysiac ritual--sparagmos; Maigel' becomes a victim of the second--omophagia. His blood, collected in Berlioz's transformed skull, is drunk by Woland and Margarita at the end of the ball (691). This sacrifice signals the final metamorphosis of Satan's ball: Woland appears in satanic regalia, and the participants and decorations vanish, leaving Margarita in Berlioz's apartment in Moscow.

Another detail recalls the attributes of Dionysus: when Margarita is about to drink, voices whisper into her ears, "Don't be afraid, queen, the blood has long since entered the earth. And where it was spilled grape clusters are already growing" (691). Wine and blood are connected with death and resurrection elsewhere in the novel as well: there is the broken pitcher on Pilat's balcony, "a red, as if bloody, puddle" (715). Later Pilat offers Afranii thirty year old Cekuba (718). Finally, Azazello uses Falernian wine to accomplish both the death and the resurrection of the Master and Margarita (785-86). The ambivalent effects of Azazello's wine exactly parallel the effects of Dionysiac drugs: Dionysiac ecstasy can lead to joy in life and a rest from grief; but the Bacchae shows it can also lead to destruction and death.

Scattered through Bulgakov's novel are various motifs reminiscent of the Bacchae. In Euripides the god drives the Theban women mad, forcing them to celebrate his orgiastic rites in the mountains against their wills. As the Asian maenads show, these rites include singing the praises of the god. When the bookkeeper of the Varieté theater Vasilii Stepanovich Lastochkin goes to the branch of the Entertainment Commission, he finds the workers engaged in involuntary choral singing (607-10). Dionysus' close association with madness is obvious: the very word "maenad" (mainas) derives from the verb "to be mad" (mainesthai). Dionysus punishes Pentheus too by first driving him mad (850-53). Pentheus, curiously, never accuses Dionysus of being insane. Woland, on the other hand, is suspected of insanity by Berlioz and Bezdomnyi (460-61);

furthermore, Woland's seventh proof seems not to require that he first drive Berlioz mad. Yet many of Woland's victims find themselves diagnosed as mad.

When Dionysus stings the Theban women with madness (32-3), he drives them out of their homes to the mountains. Many of Woland's opponents also are driven out of Moscow to Stravinskii's clinic. In Thebes only Cadmus and Teiresias acknowledge Dionysus' divinity. Pentheus, amazed that the old men are dressed in fawn-skins, their heads wreathed in ivy, thinks they are mad. In the first part of Bulgakov's novel only Bezdomnyi and the Master acknowledge Woland as a supernatural figure. They too are taken for mad by the Muscovites and end up in Stravinskii's clinic in the country dressed in medical gowns. Bezdomnyi's madness, like Cadmus' and Teiresias', is deduced from his strange dress: not fawnskins, ivy, and thyrsus, but "He was barefoot, in a torn whitish peasant shirt, on the chest of which a paper icon with the rubbed-off depiction of an unknown saint was pinned with a safety pin, in striped underpants. In his hand Ivan Nikolaevich bore a lit wedding candle" (479).

All Pentheus' attempts to bind or confine Dionysus fail. He lights a fire on his mother's tomb, which leads Pentheus to think his palace is on fire, but his men toil in vain to put out the blaze. Dionysus fashions a phantom of himself, which Pentheus tries to stab, then he causes his palace to fall to the ground (616-41). Attempts to stop or kill Woland and his gang are equally hopeless. First Woland, Korov'ev, and Begemot escape with supernatural speed from Bezdomnyi (466-67). Those who attempt to trap Begemot in a silk net¹⁷ find they catch nothing, and their bullets are equally ineffective (758-60). The only result is the destruction of the apartment, which catches fire, while the silhouette-phantoms of Woland and his gang escape (762). Recall, by the way, that this is the apartment of Berlioz, the Pentheus figure, that is destroyed. Later three men open fire on Korov'ev and Begemot at Griboedov--another of Berlioz's domains--with the same result: the bullets are

¹⁷Pentheus threatens to capture the Theban maenads in iron nets (231).

ineffective and fire breaks out (774). We later learn that thanks to Korov'ev helping the firemen the building has burned to the ground (778). Also burned is the Master's basement (787).

Even without the missing fragments of the Bacchae we know that Dionysus appeared at the conclusion in his real form as god on the roof of the palace or above the palace to announce the fates of Cadmus and Agave (1330ff.). The use of the mekhane to display gods in the air was traditional at the end of tragedies. Woland and his gang gather on the roof of the Pashkov mansion, then move to Sparrow Hills, then fly away from the earth taking on their real forms as divinities (794-95). Cadmus and Agave are exiled; the Master and Margarita leave Moscow forever.

Perhaps all these parallel motifs are mere coincidence--the result of the common archetype of the suffering and dying god, of the scapegoat, refracted in Master and Margarita through Christianity and Faust. We know from comparative mythology and the history of religion that Christianity had two ways of dealing with the pagan past: some elements were subsumed into the new religion and Christianized; others were excluded, consigned to the sphere of demons and devils. Thus elements of the Dionysus/Pentheus myth may turn up in Christ and Pilate, in Ieshua, and in Woland and Berlioz.

The Bacchae and the Master and Margarita do not fit together perfectly, though they may overlap. There are issues central to Euripides' play which have nothing to do with Bulgakov's novel; and of course there is material in the Soviet novel which has nothing to do with the Greek play composed more than two millennia before. There is apparently no evidence in the abundant materials we have on Bulgakov's work which demonstrates that he knew the Bacchae or even Euripides. Yet Bulgakov was a well-read man of the theater. What, if any, materials might have been available to him?

The text of the Bacchae was accessible in the 1894 translation by Innokentii Annenskii (Annenskii 1894). Annenskii's edition consists of a verse translation with the parallel Greek text and three articles by the translator: "Euripides, Poet and Thinker" (IX-LXVI), "Dionysus in Legend and Cult" (LXVII-XCIX), and "Euripides' Bacchae"

(157-172). The second article contains much of the material on Dionysus and the Dionysiac religion adduced above. Annenskii supplies three myths associated with Dionysus which show the god punishing mortals for their refusal to accept his rites.¹⁸

Dionysus was in the air in Russia at the beginning of the century, thanks in large part to the Classicist and Symbolist poet Viacheslav Ivanov. Ivanov published numerous articles on Dionysus and Dionysiac religion in the period from 1903-1923, culminating with his doctoral dissertation, "Dionysus and Pre-Dionysianism," which he defended in Baku in 1923 (Braginskaia 1988: 294-95). Bulgakov might conceivably have run into Ivanov in Baku in 1921, when he passed through on his way to Tiflis.¹⁹ Yet one need not posit a chance meeting to suggest Bulgakov might have been familiar with Ivanov's works on Dionysus. His articles were written for the layman and published in popular journals: *Voprosy zhizni*, *Novyi put'*, *Russkaia mysl'*, *Vesy* (Braginskaia 1988: 294). Among other things, Ivanov devotes much attention to the parallels between the Dionysiac religion and Christianity (Ivanov 1905: 134-6²⁰).

If we look at the publication and reception of Euripides' *Bacchae* and Bulgakov's *Master and Margarita*, there are more parallels. The *Bacchae*, never presented during Euripides' lifetime, was found among his papers when he died and first presented at Athens by his son or nephew, Euripides the younger. The play has always puzzled critics: was it a palinode, a deathbed conversion and recantation of the 'atheism' Euripides had been accused of by Aristophanes? Or does Dionysus' indiscriminate cruelty at the end of the tragedy mean Euripides intended the work as a polemic against Dionysiac worship? Bulgakov's novel, also published after his death, has been interpreted with equal ambivalence: is it a political or a

¹⁸The daughters of Minyas refuse to honor Dionysus until he frightens them into submission. Eventually one is driven to tear apart her son with her sisters' help. The daughters of Proetus are driven mad for refusing to take part in Dionysus' orgies; one of them eventually dies of exhaustion. Lyncurgus attacks Dionysus, but he too in the end is driven mad (he kills his wife and son) and is killed by his own people--torn apart by horses or in one version even crucified. See Annenskii 1894: LXXXIV-LXXXVI.

¹⁹On Bulgakov's journey see Chudakova 1988: 113.

²⁰Quoted in Braginskaia 1988: 325-6.

religious tract? Are we meant to take the Jerusalem novel as historical truth or fiction?

All these questions miss the mark. As Charles Segal has argued, the Bacchae is a metatragedy--a tragedy about the god of tragedy, about the ambivalence of bringing the (civilized) rites of an uncivilized god from the wilds of nature into the heart of the city. The rites cannot be completely domesticated, since the essence of the god is the dissolution of the boundaries between nature and culture. The Master and Margarita, I would argue, is also metafiction: fiction about fiction, writing about writing, and all questions about what Bulgakov believed, about whether or not the Jerusalem story really happened, are finally irrelevant. Boris Gasparov pointed out this ambivalence of myth and reality in Bulgakov: "all temporal and modal discreteness (reality vs. nonreality) vanishes" (Gasparov 1978: 198-99). Mythical thought allows for the noncausal relationship between the mythic past and the ritual present that repeats it. Berlioz's reenactment of the fate of the dying god is certainly unintentional on his part. Bulgakov may not have intentionally introduced the many parallels to the plot of Euripides' Bacchae. If Ivanov denied "borrowing" in his discussion of the origins of Dionysiac religion, Freidenberg and Frank-Kamenetskii would go on to deny borrowing of literary material pertaining to myth as well (Braginskaia 1988: 316).²¹ Myth is eternal: it repeats itself with or without the conscious participation of the actors. Bulgakov's conscious recreation of one myth may have led to an unconscious recreation of some details of another, closely related to it.

²¹In her Poetics, Freidenberg quotes Frank-Kamenetskii, who broke with the "theory of the source, according to which one plot or myth or image must necessarily be considered as deriving from another" (Frank-Kamenetskii 1925: 60), quoted in Freidenberg 1936: 36. See also Frank-Kamenetskii 1924: 128, and Freidenberg 1929: 33-60.

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