ARTICLES

"O MOTHER, TO BE REBORN WITH YOU:" FOUNDATIONAL MYTH IN VIACHESLAV IVANOV'S *TANTALUS*[1]

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Do we think about the fact that, in striving for freedom, we are seeking out captivity?
—Evgenia Gertsyk[2]

Yes, I absolutely feel I am the spiritual son of Dostoevsky, so much of his legacy is in me.
—Viacheslav Ivanov[3]

In 1921, Viacheslav Ivanov summed up his career thus: "I only know that Viacheslav Ivanov's *Tantalus* is a good work [...] Andrei Bely was right when he took *Tantalus* as the opening and central point for reviewing me. I can't judge all the rest of my work" ("Znaiu tol'ko, chto vot 'Tantal' Viacheslava Ivanova—eto proizvedenie khoroshee [...] i Andrei Bely byl prav, kogda pri razbore menia vzial iskhodnym i tsentral'nym punktom 'Tantala.' O vsem zhe ostal'nom svoem sudit' ne mogu.") (Al'tman 27–28). This striking statement suggests that Ivanov's *Tantalus* (1905), a poetic drama that almost served as his literary debut (Bogomolov 74–75), deserves significantly more attention.[4]

1. I am extremely grateful to Miriam and Alan Nussbaum for their help translating several sources, and to Michael Wachtel and *SEEJ*'s two anonymous reviewers for their generous feedback on earlier versions of this article.

2. "Dumaem li my o tom, chto stremias' k svobode, my ishchem plena?" (52). All translations from Russian are mine.

3. "Da, ia sebia absoliutno chuvstvuiu dukhovnym synom Dostoevskogo, nastol'ko vo mne ego nasledstvo" (Al'tman 32).

4. Critical literature on the tragedy is relatively sparse. Robert Bird's *The Russian Prospero* (2006) briefly discusses it together with Ivanov's later narrative works, reading it as an allegory for poetic creation. Tomas Venclova and Liudmila Borisova have both published perceptive essays on narrative and symbolic features of *Tantalus* in the context of their connection with Ivanov's other tragedies and philosophical essays. Joanna Kot's *Distance Manipulation* (1999) juxtaposes it with other contemporary Russian dramas, underscoring its esoteric language. Armin Hetzer's *Vjačeslav Ivanovs Tragödie "Tantal"* (1972) is the only book-length work devoted to

To that end, the primary purpose of this essay is to demonstrate what can be gained by examining the play on its own terms. Doing so reveals *Tantalus* to be a practical application of Ivanov's Dionysian philosophy, one which clearly informs many of his early theoretical statements on tragedy. The play is also significant as an early iteration of the rhetoric and images that Ivanov would develop in his later critical work. I will examine one specific way in which the tragedy relates to Ivanov's greater oeuvre in the essay's final section,[5] by showing how it sets the stage for his subsequent writing on Fyodor Dostoevsky.

Tantalus is a complex text, thanks to its original yet highly archaic version of Russian, which through back-formations and prosody is intended to approximate ancient Greek. Ivanov's theory of mythopoesis also informs the tragedy, in that its action and characters are motivated by symbolic and philosophical linkages, eschewing more "realistic" narrative conceits. Armin Hetzer and Tomas Venclova, among others, have suggested a number of prior myths and symbols useful for interpreting *Tantalus*, but these treatments are far from exhaustive. That being so, I aim to further analyze the symbolic structure of *Tantalus* by focusing on Ivanov's use of the earth and the natural harvest cycle. In the tragedy, this imagery becomes a symbol linked to love, existential rebellion, and Ivanov's Dionysian idea of death and resurrection.

Essential Background for an Analysis of *Tantalus*

One immediate problem the reader confronts is the tragedy's extreme divergence from any known version of the myth of Tantalus. There is no extant ancient tragedy about the character. The myth itself is consequently rather obscure, but the core narrative of *Tantalus* does correspond to a variant related by Pindar: Tantalus, son of Zeus and king of a prehistoric civilization on Mount Sipylus, sacrifices his son Pelops to the gods at a feast, distracting them so that he can steal their nectar and ambrosia, which he shares with his companions. This theft is discovered, and Tantalus is trapped in Tartarus as punishment (Pindar 2). Beyond this, however, Ivanov freely introduces new

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the text. Hetzer's monograph is valuable for its discussion of the connections between *Tantalus* and Ivanov's philosophical work, and for its treatment of the work's relationship with Nietzsche's writing. I find that some of his conclusions about the work, however, do not sufficiently engage with Ivanov's philosophy and the contents of the tragedy itself, as will be discussed below.

5. For other connections, see Caroline Lemak Brickman's "Plant, Metaphor, God: Thinking Mythically in Viacheslav Ivanov's Essays" (2020), which describes Ivanov's early essays' "repeated metaphoric cluster of pastures, fields, soil, the things that grow on them in nature and in cultivation, and the agents and instruments of that cultivation" (31) in a way that dovetails with the earth's significance in the tragedy. Jeffrey Riggs's *"A Fullness of Living Forces: Viacheslav Ivanov's Poetics of Theurgy* (2018) reads Ivanov as "an archaeologist of symbols" (23), drawing on obscure classical *realia* in his poetry to cultivate a specific, mysterious sort of symbolism. *Tantalus* is perhaps the epitome of this approach.

material.[6] The mythological criminals Ixion and Sisyphus, along with the goddess Adrastea, who is probably the most crucial figure in the work, only interact with Tantalus in Ivanov's tragedy. Broteas's role is tremendously enlarged. Tantalus's infamous punishment, in which he stands forever just out of reach of food and water, is here a prophetic dream. Finally, Tantalus's core tragic motivation, which is an existential loneliness engendered by his material wealth (Hetzer 161), is also Ivanov's invention.

Understanding the reasons for this free attitude toward the material depends on some basic facts regarding the tragedy's theoretical grounding. *Tantalus* was conceived and written between 1903 and 1904, a period during which Ivanov began writing and lecturing on his religio-aesthetic theories connected to the pre-historic Thracian cult of Dionysus. Some of his ideas about Dionysus and mythopoesis, which were published as theoretical essays during and after *Tantalus'*s composition, are worth reiterating here. Ivanov undoubtedly took these ideas seriously on their own terms as religious thought. Here, however, they are also essential aesthetic directives that inform the composition of his drama.

For Ivanov, tragedy was a form that developed out of the Dionysian rite, a hypothesized ancient ceremony of sacrifice in which the god paradoxically existed as both ritual victim and reborn god at the same time (Ivanov, *Sobranie sochinenii* 1: 719; Lahti 117–19). Tragic characters, then, were also various aspects, or masks (Hetzer 127), of the many-faced Dionysus, and not discrete, psychologically whole individuals. This aspect of Dionysian worship informs Ivanov's broader aesthetic project as well. In an early explication of Symbolism, he contrasts allegory, which is clear but limited in its scope, to symbol, which might be obscure, but by virtue thereof could express many different levels of meaning at once. The word he uses to describe the latter device is "many-faced" (*mnogolik*) (Ivanov, *Sobranie* 1: 713).

Dionysus' many-facedness, in Ivanov's view, also means that tragedy is a tool for merging disparate concepts and identities. These can be the barriers between individual personalities, which are removed in the Dionysian rite by cultivating orgiastic ecstasy (1: 721–23). He takes care to note the etymology of both this word and its Russian equivalent, *isstuplenie*, which both mean "stepping outside of oneself" in their most literal sense (3: 265). However, tragedy can also synthesize contradictory philosophical concepts. Ivanov later writes, for example, that one of the many properly tragic facets of Dostoevsky's writing is his successful elimination of the perceived antimony

6. One likely source is the Orphic myth of Dionysus, in which Dionysus is dismembered and eaten by the Titans, whom Zeus punishes with death by lightning. Riggs demonstrates that Ivanov was familiar with this myth and used it as an epigraph to a central poem in his early collection *Pilot Stars* (1903) (Riggs 136–148). The myth resonates with the Tantalus myth and with Ivanov's tragedy, but not in a straightforward, allegorical manner.

between necessitarianism and free will, which co-exist in his novels (4: 423–24).

In short, Ivanov regards tragedy as a theurgical performance that is meant to erode our everyday, individualistic understanding of how we relate to other people and to nature. This effect is achieved artistically through the paradoxical master trope of uniting opposites. The tragic narrative is derived from a "foundational myth," (*osnovnoi mif*) which is a mythical narrative that exists outside of time and thereby communicates a sense of unchanging, elemental reality to the audience (Pliukhanova 288). Tantalus himself relates this idea to his own reality at the beginning of the tragedy, in his apostrophe to the sun: "my image-Sun! Whether an eternal Titan, straining, raises you up by a heavy, steep slope before me, or the Phoenix-bird sings me its prophetic song, soaring under the heated vault between two gloamings" ("moi obraz-Solntse! Vechnyi li Titan tebia, trudias', vozvodit tiazhkoi kruchei predo mnoi, il' Feniks-ptitsa mne poet svoi veshchii gimn, paria pod svodom raskaliennym mezh dvukh zor'") (Ivanov, *Sobranie* 2: 25). The point here is that two "standard" mythical representations of the sun's movement through the sky both get at the same deep truth of Tantalus's relationship with the sun.[7] Ivanov's many aforementioned divergences from the traditional myth of Tantalus would also be justified in this sense.[8]

Tantalus and a Myth of Sowing

In reading *Tantalus*, then, ostensible conflicts and dichotomies within the work must be considered together with the awareness that there is a noumenal identity that ultimately unifies all these characters and ideas. Venclova has observed that Ixion and Sisyphus are clear doubles of Tantalus himself, and that Tantalus's son Broteas is a "contrastive double," whose relationship with Tantalus is built on "a system of oppositions" (94–95). Of course, since Venclova notes that such a system is Dionysian in Ivanov's sense (91), it is also true that the evident contrasts between Tantalus and Broteas bely their essential sameness.[9]

I point this out because Tantalus's paternal, antagonistic relationship with Broteas embodies a crucial set of themes and symbols that runs throughout

7. Ivanov affirmed in another essay that the ancients perceived something "more real" (*bolee deistvitel'noe*) than moderns when they imagined the sun to be an anthropomorphic god (2: 555).

8. Venclova similarly calls the plot of *Tantalus* a variant on "archetypal myth" (92). The apparent immutability of such foundational myths suggests that Ivanov is not self-consciously creating a distinct, individual narrative, as I will discuss with regard to Dostoevsky.

9. Hetzer interprets Broteas as an imperfect, purely mortal double who is ultimately distinct from his father (92, 94, 164, 191). Although the tragedy does distinguish between the two at points, this reading does not fully account for the symbolic and structural connections that unite them. It is problematic to distinguish too sharply between mortality and divinity in *Tantalus*: the hero shares the attributes of both, which is in accord with Ivanov's idea of Dionysian ecstasy as an actual contact with divinity.

the entire work. Based on what has already been said about the concept of foundational myth, it becomes possible to read the tragedy as Ivanov's dramatization of a symbolic cycle of fathers and rebellious sons, which takes on profound, metaphysical dimensions.[10] He achieves this in part by linking this familial conflict with the imagery of an ancient harvest cycle.[11] This may not sound particularly novel on its face, but mythopoesis, as has been mentioned, does not prioritize originality in an individual narrative. The interrelation of these motifs also informs the images of the most enigmatic figures in the tragedy, Zeus and Adrastea.

The first explicit mention of anything related to planting comes in Tantalus's description of making love to the goddess Dione: "I kissed Eternity on the lips, Eternity kissed its Moment on its full lips, its boundless, its inescapable, Seed-Moment" ("Vechnost' ia lobzal v usta, lobzala Vechnost' v polnye usta svoi Mig, bezbrezhnyi svoi, svoi neizbezhnyi, Semia-Mig") (Ivanov, *Sobranie* 2: 29). This paradoxical unity between eternity and a moment is something that Ivanov elsewhere applies to Dionysian ecstasy, which "knows its unified boundless moment, which bears its eternal miracle within itself" ("znaiet edinyi svoi, bezbrezhnyi mig, v sebe nesushchii svoe vechnoe chudo") (1: 724). Here, the evocation of a metaphorical "seed" clearly resonates with Dione's bearing him a pair of children, which he mentions subsequently. An earlier moment in this same monologue also deals with this connection: "When youth enkindled the heat of love, I cried out to The Moment: 'You are magnificent!'—And, lo [...] Broteas, the firstborn, was born, mortal, from a burnt-out mother" ("Kogda zhe iunost' vospalila zhar liubvi, voskliknul ia Mgnoveniiu: 'Prekrasno ty!'—i, se [...] Broteas-pervenets rodilsia, smertnyi, ot ugasshei materi") (2: 28–29).[12] Here we have the same cluster of love and "momentariness" combining and leading to the birth of a child, although the language of planting is not explicitly present. Later in the tragedy, however, Broteas makes the connection explicit, describing Tantalus's role in his conception as "having sowed mortality" (*tlen poseiav*) (2: 47).

Ivanov has his characters express their conceptions of reproduction and family ties with agricultural imagery because it evokes a sense of how these pre-Homeric figures might understand their relationship with reality. Love and childbirth are the same as planting seeds because both imply the same

10. Given Tantalus's role as the founder of the house of Atreides, there is also a thematic connection to Aeschylus's *Oresteia* in this reading, as I will note below.

11. Toporov writes that seeds are associated with the principle of freedom in both of Ivanov's tragedies, and that *Tantalus* is a tragedy of individual freedom (98, 107–09). This would seem to be in accord with one of Tantalus's final lines in the tragedy, which associates his loss of freedom with casting a seed and with death (Ivanov, 2: 73).

12. This line also echoes both Faust's wager with Mephistopheles and his final words before dying and ascending to heaven (Hetzer 172), which is worth noting as a clear example of Ivanov synthesizing modern literature and ancient myth.

essential cycle of death and rebirth. More significantly, the metaphorical connection between these cycles inflects other conflicts in the tragedy, making the text truly mythical in the sense that Ivanov intends.[13]

The first clear development of this cluster of symbols comes shortly after Tantalus's reminiscences of love, in his description of the dream that foreshadows his punishment in Tartarus. As one of his first explicit statements of theomachy (*bogoborstvo*), he states that he intends to name new stars: "And a crop of constellations will sprout through the virgin soil in your airy field, along my furrows!..." ("i vskolositsia novinoi sozvezdii sev v efirnom pole vashem po brazdam moim!...") (2: 29). The same language of sowing, sprouting and soil is clearly now related to the heavens, but also to theomachy, since in speaking of sowing a new crop of stars, Tantalus implies that his desire is to own the sky, i.e., to become a god himself. Ivanov considers this metaphysical rebellion to be an essential part of tragedy.

The sleepiness that prefigures Tantalus's prophetic vision overpowers him like it does a "plowman" (*aratai*) exhausted at midday. The subsequent dream itself describes Tantalus's traditional mythical punishment, in which he is tormented by nearby yet unreachable food and water. It is worth noting that Ivanov, in describing his hero's inability to reach food above his head, uses the phrase "the abundance was shed" ("osypalos' obilie") (2: 30). The verb used here can specifically describe the shedding of grain in the fall. Here, then, Tantalus predicts the cycle of defying the gods and then submitting to their power that plays out over the course of the tragedy, and also links it to agricultural life cycles. This is reiterated at the end of the play, when Tantalus, actually in Tartarus, again alludes to the image of shedding grain that he has already predicted and links it to the setting of the sun: "Tantalus, parent of suns, has grown dim! He who has cast the seed, is dead..." ("Smerknul Tantal, roditel' solnts! Kto brosil semia,—mertv...") (2: 73).[14] Tantalus is not literally dead, but his tragic fall has doomed him for eternity,[15] and it also completes the symbolic cycle of planting that we have observed.

A Family Myth

The agricultural cycle renews every year, though, and Tantalus's descent into hell is only the end of one such loop. It is no coincidence that Tantalus

13. He explicitly reiterates the idea that a mythical symbol must be simultaneously associated with multiple different meanings in a subsequent essay (2: 636).

14. The association between grain and the sun here resonates with Venclova's reading, where ascent and descent, or the sun and night, are a "correlated binary series" that are fundamental for myth and inform the entire structure of the work (93, 95–99). Hetzer also suggests that "descent" in this mythological sense is related to a recognition of the earth's spiritual importance in the tragedy (188), which has bearing on the significance of agricultural symbolism here as well.

15. Venclova calls this "death in immortality" (92).

calls himself "parent" in the above quote. Fathering children is persistently described in terms of sowing in the text, and the natural cycle is repeated within the tragedy in the form of familial history. The mythical connection between these concepts is clearest at the height of the play's action when Tantalus prepares to sacrifice his son Pelops to the gods. He recites an ecstatic, Dionysian monologue: "I birth myself, another. Arise, rejoice, from the sun—the sun!... You, son of my love, you, who are I myself, as I was" ("Sebia, inogo, ia razhdaiu. Vstan', vzygrai, iz solntsa—solntse!... Ty zhe, syn moei liubvi, ty, kto—ia sam, kakim ia byl") (2: 52). The chorus's strophe, which follows immediately after this speech, makes the association between the harvest and a father's sacrifice of a son explicit: "You are the crop; and you bend down for the sickle-harvest" ("Ty—sev; i ty nikniesh' zhatvoi serpnoi") (2: 53). The "you" in this quotation is the mythical concept of Sacrifice, which the strophe also connects to the rising and setting of the sun. This image unites Tantalus and Pelops by implicating them in the same mythical cycle.

Pelops is both Tantalus's son and another one of his doubles, like Broteas.[16] The tragedy contains two intergenerational conflicts: Tantalus rebels against his father Zeus, and is opposed by Broteas at the same time. These relationships are not simply thematically connected. They are instead the exact same symbolic conflict, playing out in various forms simultaneously.[17] This makes sense in the light of Ivanov's aforementioned understanding of Dionysian tragedy as an art form that unites opposites by subsuming them in the many-faced god's universal identity, but it is still worth briefly considering how Ivanov actively employs this part of his philosophy in the text.

As noted above, Tantalus uses the word "burnt-out" (*ugasshaia*) to describe Broteas's mortal mother. The word resonates with a traditional myth of Dionysus's own birth, in which the god's mother is Semele, a mortal woman who is literally burnt to ashes when she looks at Zeus's true form. Ivanov's own chorus evokes this myth in a later strophe, calling Zeus "secret in-law, parent of the fire-born son of Semele" ("tainyi ziat', syna Semely roditel' ognerozhdennogo") (2: 39). As the god-like father of a son born to a "burnt-out" mother, Tantalus partially merges with the traditional figure of Zeus. As the son of Zeus and a mortal woman, however, Tantalus (also Broteas's double) has an origin similar to Dionysus's. Completing these allusive overlaps, Tantalus calls Broteas his "firstborn" (*pervenets*), a term that Tantalus also applies to himself to describe his relationship with Zeus (2: 27, 29).

16. Broteas contrasts his ugliness with Pelops's beauty, but he does so with the language of masks (Ivanov, *Sobranie* 2: 45), which, for Ivanov, conceal essential identity. This physical dichotomy, then, should not be taken as fundamentally real. Venclova also comments on the opposition of the two sons, but his note appears in the same context as the opposition between Tantalus and Broteas, suggesting that the two children could also be "contrastive doubles" (94).

17. Hetzer also notes that they are "parallel" (91–92), although Broteas's hunger again distinguishes him excessively in Hetzer's reading.

The shared status of "firstborn" is also noteworthy because it appears in the contexts of Tantalus's and Broteas's clashes with their respective fathers. Tantalus links his rebellion to the wealth that he has claimed since birth ("Am I eternally merely the offspring of kindness, merely the son of a king's caress, merely—the son of Abundance?" ("Vechno l' ia—lish' chado milosti, lish' syn tsarevoi laski, lish'—Obil'ia syn?") (2: 27)). The satisfaction of all his earthly desires leads to his dream of rivaling the gods in heaven. The circumstances of Broteas's birth, i.e., his keenly felt mortality and his desire to overcome it, similarly provoke his resentment of his own father.[18]

In both cases, the fathers offer material rewards to their children, which are rejected. Tantalus clearly expresses his dissatisfaction with further gifts from Olympus at the text's beginning, choosing instead to assert his pure individuality: "Maidens, I am free to honor the gods with gifts; but their gifts do not serve me. We are different. I AM; I exist in myself" ("Darami, devy, volen ia bessmertnykh chtit'; no ikh dary mne neugodny. Chuzhdy my. Ia esm'; v sebe ia") (2: 28). This makes his later attempt to assuage Broteas's resentment all the more striking: "Son, what is mine is yours! The storehouses are open, and the treasures lie within. Take all that your hand can grasp" ("Syn, moe—tvoe! Otkryty klady, i sokrovishcha lezhat na etom lone. Vse beri, chto dlan' vmestit") (2: 46). There is no contradiction here, since these overlaps and confusion between different fathers and sons already reflect Ivanov's conception of tragic characters as masks for archetypical narrative structures. This mythopoetic logic allows Tantalus to almost simultaneously choose rebellion as a son and feebly attempt to prevent it as a father.[19]

Zeus's own identity as both father and head god is similarly complex. Through various characters' use of the epithets "Kronion" and "Kronid," or son of Kronos, to refer to the god (2: 27–28, 45, 50, 66), Ivanov implicates Zeus in this familial cycle as a figure who overthrew his own father. As the work progresses, moreover, it also becomes less clear that "Zeus" is a stable identity that refers to a single, divine entity. In the traditional myth, Poseidon is the only god who desires Pelops (Pindar 2). Ivanov's modification has both Zeus and Poseidon quarreling over the boy. In discussing this rivalry, more-

18. Hetzer correctly notes that Zeus, Tantalus and Dionysus are meant to overlap (88). He also claims, however, that Broteas's rejecting his father's offered gift of immortality fundamentally distinguishes him from these other figures (163). I would suggest that Broteas's decision to discard the gods' nectar has more to do with his desire to rebel against Tantalus than with an insufficiency in his desire. Gertsyk seems to support this reading, writing in her essay that Tantalus's wealth and his son's lack are essentially the same (55–56).

19. The same approach informs another seemingly illogical moment, when Tantalus challenges Broteas to join him in rebellion: "Dare—or submit!" ("Derzai—ili smiriaisia") Broteas's immediate response—"I have dared!" ("Ia derznul")—seems to voice his assent. However, he attempts to spear his father directly afterwards (2: 49–50). There is not necessarily a contradiction here, either. Broteas's position within the mythical cycle means that his rebellion has to be directed against his father, rather than Zeus.

over, Tantalus describes the two gods thus: "Two different-faced Moirae rocked the single cradle of the two twins. Two brothers sit at the feast, hold council, are served, they cover the unknown face with a similar mask" ("Dvukh bliznetsov kachali kolybel' odnu dve raznolikikh Moiry. Na piru sidiat dva brata, na besede, ugoshchaiutsia, lichinoi skhozhei kroiut lik neznaemyi") (2: 39). The motif of two in one, expressed by both the cradle and the mask of the brothers, again evokes Ivanov's concept of Dionysus as the fundamental, many-faced god, even capable of assuming different divine guises.[20]

Ivanov's mythopoeia in *Tantalus* connects the process of sowing and reaping to other "natural" cycles, those of theomachy and submission and of fathering children. In the same way that what is planted must be harvested, those who rebel must fail and submit, and sons must rebel against their fathers, only to assume their roles. These processes are symbolically tied to each other at key moments in the narrative, as in the lines cited above regarding Tantalus's sacrifice of Pelops, the rebirth of the sun, and the idea of sacrifice as harvest.

Tantalus believes that this sacrifice and his subsequent theft from the gods will lead to an individual, Nietzschean self-transcendence:[21] hence the claim in his soliloquy that suns produce other suns.[22] In reality, of course, the sun-

20. In this sense, the rivalry between Zeus and Poseidon also doubles Broteas's resentment of Pelops. The idea that Ivanov treats Zeus as a mask for Dionysus might also be encouraged by his poem "The Maenad" (1906). Also intended for inclusion in a tragedy (Ivanov, *Sobranie* 2: 298), the poem is a dithyrambic paean to Dionysus that also incorporates many of the images traditionally associated with Zeus, such as black clouds and lightning (2: 227–28). Gertsyk writes that Zeus's role in the pantheon is diminished in Ivanov (52–53), and Venclova alludes to the Orphic Zeus as one who "conceals within himself the heart of Dionysus" (97).

21. As the better-known son of Tantalus, Pelops's secondary role in the tragedy complicates, but does not essentially alter, the reading. Tantalus calls him a second self, as noted above. Pelops also reiterates the device of seemingly distinct mythical figures sharing an essential identity, which we observe with Tantalus, Ixion, and Sisyphus. The chorus calls him "Ganymede," and, in 1904, Ivanov published the verses that would become Pelops's monologues in the tragedy as a dithyrambic poem literally called "Ganymede" (Lahti 124–25). Bird suggests that Pelops redeems Tantalus by ascending to heaven (89), but, as Ivanov surely has in mind, Pelops is subsequently cast out of Olympus. He goes on to found the Greek house of Atreus, the cyclical violence of which is the subject of Aeschylus's *Oresteia*. In other words, sun-like rebirth in one's child is also individual and ephemeral: Pelops, like Broteas, will follow in his father's footsteps. Venclova notes that Ivanov's *Prometheus* is structured so as to end where the Aeschylus play about the Titan begins (90–91). We might suggest that another version of this conceit is at work in *Tantalus*, where the cyclical struggle begun in this play "continues" in Aeschylus as the curse of the Atreides. As Ivanov would have known, the names "Broteas" and "Tantalus" even recurred in later generations of the mythical family ("Broteas," 830). From this perspective, the predominance of Dionysian imagery in *Tantalus* can also be understood as a dithyrambic "prehistory" to the establishment of Apollonian law that concludes Aeschylus's trilogy.

22. The image symbolizes that sense of individual immortality that Ivanov finds deserving of critique in Nietzsche. In "Nietzsche and Dionysus," he describes Nietzsche's interest in

light of day is followed by night,[23] as is made literal by the darkness of Tartarus at the end of the tragedy. This opposition of sun and night is also connected to another symbolic set of oppositions in Broteas's monologues. When Broteas returns to Mount Sipylus in his second attempt to rebel against his father, he describes himself thus: "Godkiller, avenger-son, I have come" ("Bogoubiitsei, syn-otmstitel', ia prishel") (2: 69).[24] He is a "dark son" (*temnyi syn*), as opposed to the endless parade of suns that Tantalus sees in a dream at this point. Love has provoked Tantalus's "sowing," but it also engenders hatred and a desire for vengeance in his son.[25] All of this is poetically connected, as Broteas makes clear: "The plowman of immortal fields, he sees his crop of birthed suns... Yet he sowed me in the perishability of the mortal world!" ("Oratai niv bessmertnykh, vidit on svoi sev rodimykh solnts... Menia zh poseial v dol'nii tlen!") (2: 68)

Broteas's ultimate rejection of the gift of immortality is symbolically linked to Tantalus's fall, as he pours out the nectar, is struck by lightning, and a deep darkness covers the stage. It is also Broteas's own moment of rebellion and tragic self-destruction. His final words in the tragedy reiterate the ideas that we have observed with Tantalus and Pelops: "Spill, as the world's sacrifice! As a rich sacrifice onto the field of eternal Truth!... O Mother, to be reborn with you..." ("Proleisia zhertvoi mira! Zhertvoi tuchnoiu na nivu Pravdy vechnoi!... Mat', s toboi ozhit'...") (2: 70). Here, the symbolic gestalt of sacrifice, agricultural rebirth, and familial conflict unifies itself yet again. Tantalus subsequently appears in Tartarus, holding onto a black sun (Ivanov, *Sobranie* 2: 73; Venclova 95). Ivanov himself associates Dionysus with the "night Sun" (*nochnoe Solntse*) in a subsequent essay (Ivanov, *Sobranie* 2: 555), explaining what he has in mind with this image: Tantalus's fall and punishment is a result of his inability to properly grasp the full, paradoxical nature of Dionysus. This is also Broteas's failure, although it takes a different

Dionysus as solely focused on the ecstasy and aesthetic pleasure of ancient Dionysian rites. Ivanov argues that Dionysus valorized suffering and individual death, as well as pleasure: "He was the annunciation of a joyful death, which concealed in itself the pledge of another life there, below..." ("On byl blagovestiem radostnoi smerti, taiashchei v sebe obety inoj zhizni tam, vnizu") (1: 720).

23. The relationship of the tragedy's structural ascent and descent with the sun is discussed in other works (Hetzer 162; Venclova 95), and Ivanov himself later stated that the sun imagery was connected to Nietzsche (Al'tman 28). Tantalus's flawed vision of an endless day is also in accord with Venclova's point that Tantalus is not a full expression of Ivanov's ideology: he and Prometheus "are essentially incomplete, disharmonious, and embody only one part or aspect of the Dionysian existence" (92).

24. This scene, where Broteas speaks to Tantalus, who is dreaming, and dooms his father by pouring out the azure nectar that he has taken from the gods, echoes the scene between Tantalus and Pelops that we have already mentioned. Broteas is referring to his father as a god in this quotation, which further unifies the familial conflicts motivating both Broteas and Tantalus.

25. As Broteas tells Tantalus earlier in the play: "I came to see your face!... Love binds tight; hatred more so" ("Tvoi uvidet' lik prishel!... Tesna liubov; tesnee nenavist'") (2: 43).

form. Tantalus fails to recognize the necessity of losing one's individuality in Dionysian rebirth; Broteas fails to accept rebirth's reality.

Adrastea's Identities: The Earth as Mother

The goddess Adrastea gets the final word in the tragedy, though, addressing Tantalus with many of the same words that appear in his earlier prophetic dream. A brief discussion of Adrastea's figure and role in the tragedy will further develop the symbolic connections being analyzed here. She is also called "Faceless" (*Bezlikaia*) and "Inevitable" (*Neizbezhnaia*) in the tragedy (2: 31),[26] and the former epithet suggests a metaphysical connection with Dionysus (Hetzer 167–68). Adrastea is clearly essential for Ivanov. Not only does she appear at the work's very end, but Tantalus apostrophizes her more than any other divine figure in the text. The moral that Tantalus is taught yet refuses to heed at the beginning of the text, prompting his tragic fall, is of her design: "Maidens, the goddess, in whose cave is hidden the secret of my emptiness, Adrastea, whispers to me: *Learn not to imagine Man's power to be measureless"* ("Boginia, devy, chei vertep tait moei pustyni taina,—shepchet Adrasteia mne: 'Uchis' ne mnit' bezmernoi Cheloveka moshch'") (2: 27). It is clear that she represents inevitable fate,[27] and that she is a Symbolist eternal feminine. Her other mythological associations, though, are even more relevant for our purposes.

The cave that Tantalus refers to in the above quote is a physical place that he visits in order to pray to Adrastea. Ixion and Sisyphus likewise take refuge in this cave in the middle of the work (2: 31, 57). As such, it is likely meant to be a shrine for an earth deity. I note this because Ivanov sets his tragedy on Mount Sipylus. This is consistent with Pindar, but Ivanov would also have known that the real mountain in Asia Minor contains an extremely ancient sculpture that is traditionally identified as Cybele, earth deity and mother of the gods. According to local folklore, moreover, Broteas created this figure (Pausanias 139).[28] The specificity of the tragedy's setting and the repeated reference to a nearby shrine to Adrastea are decisions suggesting that Ivanov was familiar not only with this sculpture, but also with research on the nearby ruins of Cyzicus and Smyrna. Shrines and pictorial representations in each of these areas suggest that Adrastea was a hypostasis for two other goddesses: Nemesis, goddess of righteous vengeance, and Cybele ("Adrastea" 77; "Kybele" 1644; "Nemesis" 122).[29]

26. The name "Adrastea" itself might also mean "inevitable," although it is unclear whether this word is ultimately derived from Greek or Phrygian ("Adrastea" 78).

27. Ivanov also says as much in a footnote to a contemporaneous poem (*Sobranie* 1: 859).

28. In the play, Broteas mentions his habit of sculpting stone figures, which is undoubtedly motivated by the figure at Sipylus (2: 48).

29. Cybele was also linked to the original Thracian cult of Dionysus, most notably in Euripides's *Bacchae*. Some scholars considered her to be either Dionysus's consort or his precursor ("Kybele" 1658–59).

Ivanov's symbol of inevitable fate is also associated with both vengeance and the earth, through the actions and motivations of the work's main characters. Broteas's self-identification and actions as a would-be avenger have already been discussed. In his description of what being immortal would mean for him, moreover, he also evinces a strong desire for a connection with the earth that is explicitly framed in terms of motherhood, evoking Cybele: "Oh, that would be—to kiss my mother, the sacred Earth, and call her mine" ("O, eto budet—mat' lobzat', sviatuiu Zemliu, i narech' ee svoei") (Ivanov, *Sobranie* 2: 48).[30] His yearning for immortality, as I have noted, is also the source of his conflict with his father. As such, his essential tragic motivations connect concepts symbolized by Adrastea, Nemesis, and Cybele.

Tantalus's relationship with Adrastea as a partially embodied figure has already been noted, but his specific ties to vengeance and the earth form part of the tragedy's mythical pattern as well. With regard to the former concept, note Tantalus's climactic monologue preceding his sacrifice of Pelops: "Heaven's gift — to the heavens!... Tantalus pays. He himself is repayment. He pays for all gifts with himself" ("Dar neba—nebu!... Platit Tantal. Mzda—on sam. Za vse dary soboiu platit") (2: 52). Here, Ivanov clearly plays on the archaic word for repayment, *mzda*, which can also mean revenge. Both apply here, since the literal context is that of gift-giving, but Tantalus also intends to avenge himself on the gods for the loss of his son. His act, like Broteas's after him, is thus best understood as a vengeful attack on the gods (this is also how Broteas understands his revenge against Tantalus, as has been mentioned) that is subsequently punished. Both characters, then, suffer divine retribution, which is Nemesis's purview, after attempting individual revenge on their own.[31]

Tantalus's relationship with the earth is also significant, since the wealth that he both possesses and complains of throughout the work is couched explicitly in terms of natural, "earthly" images.[32] This connection once again evokes the figure of Cybele, as Tantalus anthropomorphizes the earth by referring to its bosom (2: 27). In other words, although Tantalus's wealth is in one sense the opposite of Broteas's alienation from the earth, both of them acknowledge the earth as their mother and origin. Moreover, both lack the relationship with the earth that they would desire. This theme is developed and ended by Adrastea herself at the conclusion of the tragedy, when she tells Tan-

30. This desire echoes Tantalus's aforementioned wish to name new constellations, especially since the Russian verb *narech'* is used in both speeches to describe the act of naming. Tantalus's wishing for heaven and Broteas's wishing for the Earth underscores their "contrastive" doubling, but both desires express the same fundamental alienation.

31. Hetzer also observes Adrastea's mythological associations with Nemesis and her symbolic connection to vengeance in the tragedy (90).

32. The chorus refers to his wealth as that of Gaia's, who is "All-Mother" (*Vsemateri*), but she is not mentioned again. This is likely because Cybele is more strongly associated with Asia Minor ("Kybele" 1643, 1655–58).

talus "you are mine" ("ty—moi") and "I was yours" ("ia byla tvoei") (2: 73). The former expression seems comprehensible as a statement of the fact that Tantalus has been forced to submit before inevitability. It is less immediately clear how Adrastea could have belonged to Tantalus before the tragedy's end since he was never in control of fate. He was organically connected to the earth, however, and therefore possessed the capacity for rebirth, which he has lost by the end.[33]

In short, *Tantalus*'s Adrastea is best understood as a conceptual figure that links the idea of a person's inevitable fate to the earth, which is here a chthonic source of collective life and the origin of the "agricultural," cyclical conflict made manifest by Tantalus and Broteas. This helps us understand the tragedy's ending, as well. I have already noted Tantalus's final allusion to the fate of one who casts a seed, but it is worth emphasizing that he also connects this to Adrastea: "He who has cast a seed is dead... So that is your pledge, Adrastea!" ("Kto brosil semia,—mertv... Tak vot obet tvoi, Adrasteia!") (2: 73). This again connects inevitability with an organic, earthly image, mythically suggesting that the earth, as the ultimate source of life, inevitably causes death, as well. Tantalus's efforts to transcend this cycle of death and rebirth as an individual doom him to hell. To "respect Adrastea" ("chtit' Adrasteiu"), as Ivanov claims in a contemporaneous essay the properly Symbolist artist must do (1: 731), is to instead transcend one's individual consciousness and recognize the metaphysical connection between oneself and the rest of humanity, along with the myths that properly elucidate this mode of being. Ivanov believed that this could be achieved through the transformative power of tragedy, understood as the Dionysian rite.

Relationship with Dostoevsky. *Tantalus* as Proto-Exegesis

To sum up what has been said so far, *Tantalus* was a concrete, aesthetically striking explication of Ivanov's early philosophy. The initially cryptic nature of the overlapping relationships between characters and symbols ultimately gives way to a new, artistically felt understanding of these figures' deep, essential unity. In this sense, the tragedy deserves the centrality that Ivanov accords it in the words quoted at the beginning of this essay. However, Ivanov also calls it a starting point (Al'tman 28), suggesting that the text's diachronic relationship with his later work also deserves consideration that it has yet to

33. Hetzer's supposition that the relationship between Tantalus and Adrastea is romantic is admittedly hypothetical (90, 92, 95). His suggestion that Adrastea is a symbol of collectivity or impersonality (174) is in keeping with my reading, but it is difficult to agree with his conclusion that she represents Tantalus's longing to overcome individuation, which he achieves at the tragedy's end through orgiastic unification with the suffering god (174, 190). Tantalus's Nietzchean individualism is something that Ivanov critiqued elsewhere (Ivanov, *Sobranie* 1: 720; Hetzer 127), In the tragedy, Tantalus's position in Tartarus is an isolated one, and he only hears the pained "voices" of Ixion, Sisyphus, and Adrastea. A positive, orgiastic ending is absent.

receive. In order to partially rectify this problem, I will now shift gears and consider how the tragedy's symbolism functions as a rehearsal for some of Ivanov's subsequent theoretical writing on Dostoevsky.

What I have outlined up to this point is a thematic gestalt in *Tantalus* that combines fate, a mythical, chthonic concept of the earth, and the tragedy's logic of familial conflict. In short: there is a fixed relationship between fathers and sons. Conflict between them inevitably arises, because of the simple fact of birth, and can even lead to attempted parricide. The repeated use of agricultural language and metaphors to describe *Tantalus'*s familial dynamic suggests that it occurs and recurs naturally. This symbolic linkage also suggests that the rebellion for the sake of revenge we see in Tantalus's and Broteas's actions also becomes rebellion against the earth. Tantalus's transgressions against the gods are not punished by Zeus-Dionysus, but instead by Adrastea. Broteas's last words express an alienation from an earth-mother. In both cases, moreover, this inevitable rebellion ends poorly. Broteas is killed, and Tantalus is trapped in the underworld for eternity.

As Ivanov himself observed, the tragedy's gestalt of sun imagery develops directly out of Nietzsche's writing (Al'tman 27–28).[34] The literary basis for Ivanov's complementary myth of the earth remains to be considered. Given the description I have provided, though, Dostoevsky's final novels are one likely source for this collection of themes and symbols.[35] It is hard to believe that the similarities between *Tantalus* and Dostoevsky's work are coincidental, given Ivanov's lifelong and well-documented admiration for the earlier writer.[36] In the essay "Nietzsche and Dionysus" (1904), Ivanov had praised Dostoevsky as a great mystagogue and a teacher of Nietzsche's, specifically citing the "joy and ecstasy" ("vostorg i isstuplenie") with which Alyosha Karamazov kisses the earth to suggest that Dostoevsky understood the essence of Dionysian realities (Ivanov 1: 717).[37] *Tantalus*, moreover, is a Russian response to Nietzsche that emerges at a moment when, as Liudmila Artamokshina discusses, the country's intelligentsia was explicitly interpreting Nietzsche's work through the prism of Dostoevsky's novels and characters

34. This theme, as has been noted, is also treated extensively in Hetzer's and Venclova's works.

35. The tragedy is in dialogue with Dostoevsky, but it is difficult to be certain of the specific vector of influence. Dostoevsky's writing may be a latent source for Ivanov's Dionysian theory. Perhaps Ivanov only draws on Dostoevsky because of the Dionysian elements he reads into the novels: it is his position that Dostoevsky only made intuitive use of myth and tragedy (4: 411). Both possibilities may be true. Regardless, *Tantalus* is relevant as an early moment in the history of Ivanov's engagement with Dostoevsky.

36. See the new edition of Ivanov's book *Dostoevsky*. *Tragedia-mif-mistika* for a detailed chronology and several critical articles that discuss Ivanov's engagement with Dostoevsky.

37. Maria Pliukhanova also suggests that Ivanov, by criticizing Nietzsche as a thinker who failed to understand suffering and negativity as part of Dionysianism, evinces an implicit preference for Dostoevsky's thought (286–87).

(119–22). Given these personal and cultural dynamics, it would make sense for *Tantalus* to reflect at least latent engagement with the great novelist.

The tragedy contains at least one direct allusion to Dostoevsky, in the early epithet that the chorus applies to Tantalus,"man-god" (*chelovekobog*). This is undoubtedly connected to Dostoevsky's novels, where it appears in two critical scenes: in *Demons*, Kirillov uses the term (Hetzer 189) to justify his famous theory of suicide, subtextually parodying Vladimir Solovyov's "god-manhood" (*bogochelovechestvo*). In *The Brothers Karamazov*, moreover, Ivan Karamazov's devil imagines a future where "man will be exalted with the spirit of divine, titanic pride, and the man-god will appear" (Dostoevsky 649). The devil's (and Ivan's) thought process here presents the man-god's existence as the result of a struggle against both God and nature, which expresses Tantalus's position in the tragedy quite well. Given how significant these two scenes are for Dostoevsky, it is safe to assume that Ivanov was aware of the term's provenance.

Dostoevsky's final novel also neatly dovetails with the broader thematic structure under discussion in this paper.[38] Ivanov had wanted to write about its mystical elements as early as 1888, by which time Ivanov had already found the synthesis of opposites that runs throughout *Tantalus* in Dostoevsky.[39] The novel's foundational myth is strikingly similar to that of *Tantalus*, despite an unsurprising discrepancy in the two works' styles and formal structures. Dostoevsky's *karamazovshchina* is a structuring identity for every member of the Karamazov family, but also symbolically represents the general spiritual conflict of the Russian people. Similarly, as discussed above, Zeus, Tantalus and Broteas act out an intergenerational conflict, stemming from an essential shared identity, that ultimately becomes a commentary on the human condition. Parricide's symbolic dimension as an unpardonable rebellion against metaphysical order is clear in both works. Both Dostoevsky and Ivanov use the earth as a symbol of the spiritually redemptive dimension of human experience, a site for death and rebirth, although no character in *Tantalus* successfully unites with the earth in the manner of Alyosha Karamazov. In this sense, Tantalus's punishment and his final monologue, in which casting a seed down symbolizes an inevitable death, reformulates the posi-

38. *Demons* is another model, since many of the thematic elements under discussion here are present in that novel, as will be discussed later. Hetzer mentions Dostoevsky as a potential source for the tragedy's idea of reunion with the earth, but he does not develop the suggestion (189).

39. Ivanov describes the novel thus in 1888: "the pure love of the Christian is born in the savage love of the reprobate, just as a miraculous flower grows out of a decomposing corpse [...] the reader, with especial clarity, sees the organic ties that hold good and evil together in a single and murky whole" ("chistaia liubov' khristianina rozhdaetsia na dikoi liubvi razvratnika, kak chudnyi svetok vyrastaet iz razlozhivshegosia trupa [...] zritel' s osobennoiu iasnost'iu vidit organicheskie sviazi, derzhashchie dobro i zlo nerazryvno soedinennymi v edinom i mrachnom tselom") (Ivanov, "Intellektual'nyi dnevnik" 15).

tive, Biblical epigraph to *Brothers Karamazov*[40] and its thematic resonances within the novel in a manner more appropriate for a tragedy.

Clearly, Dostoevsky's art is relevant for *Tantalus* with regard to themes and metaphors, not style. Moreover, the ideal or "mythical" essence of Dostoevsky's characters and plots has long been a subject of critical comment. Even so, *Tantalus'*s engagement with this aspect of Dostoevsky's art is worthy of note, given that Ivanov himself anticipated many of our modern commonplaces about Dostoevsky's work (Terras 156–57), and that the tragedy predates all of his long-form work on the author. In other words, *Tantalus'*s artistic representation of theories that Ivanov would later explicitly apply to Dostoevsky makes it possible to read the tragedy as a prototype for the writer's later, better-known critical work.[41] It raised some of the latent thematic structures and devices in Dostoevsky's art onto the explicit levels of plot and imagery before Ivanov ever wrote about them directly.

To make this final point clear, it is worth considering *Tantalus'*s relationship with observations from Ivanov's first lengthy publication on the novelist, "Dostoevsky and the Novel-Tragedy" (1911). Some images from the tragedy recur. Ivanov's poetic description of Dostoevsky as a guide in a dark labyrinth, illuminating the hidden and sometimes monstrous aspects of the human psyche (Ivanov, *Sobranie* 4: 403), reiterates a metaphor applied in the tragedy to Tantalus, whose mind, once his plan to rebel against the gods is revealed, is similarly described as a mysterious labyrinth. Dostoevsky's Muse is described as a Dionysian maenad or as one of the Erinyes (4: 417), which are both images that Ivanov developed in his lyric poetry on antiquity, and specifically in *Tantalus*.[42]

These overlaps in isolated metaphor, though, do not exhaust the extent of the two works' cohesion. Ivanov calls Dostoevsky's supermen "representa-

40. "Nietzsche and Dionysus" shows that Ivanov already considered union with the earth to be essential for Dostoevsky while composing *Tantalus*, but Ivanov, like Dostoevsky, also treated the earth as a serious Biblical symbol. As Vasily Petrov discusses, a lecture of Ivanov's from 1909 used the Bible to frame a myth of a future symbolic reunion between Christ-Dionysus and the earth. This myth of the earth's religious significance, moreover, reappeared in two of Ivanov's subsequent publications on Dostoevsky (Petrov 268).

41. As Andrei Shishkin notes, Ivanov constantly strove to overcome the boundary between academic and poetic work, treating them as complementary parts of the same project (268–69). Petrov comes to a similar conclusion, observing "open stylization" in both Ivanov's academic speech and his poetry (261). The tragedy is also part of this pattern, as Venclova suggests by noting that the tragedy is informed "by the view of a philologist and philosopher" (93). Ivanov originally planned to publish the work even before printing his early lectures on the cult of Dionysus (Bogomolov 33). In other words, he was willing to let the tragedy itself be a cold introduction to his Dionysian theory for part of his audience. In the same sense, we should consider the tragedy to be one artistic nucleus for his later, critical interpretations of Dostoevsky's novels.

42. The Erinyes appear in a passage about Ixion (2: 42). Ivanov also quotes from his poem "Maenad," which, as mentioned earlier, was meant to be part of Ivanov's unfinished *Niobe*. This again suggests a link between Ivanov's early tragic project and his subsequent theoretical output.

tives of an idealistic individualism, central suns of the universe" ("predstavitelei idealisticheskogo individualizma, tsentral'nykh solnts vselennoi") who are prototypes for Nietzsche's Zarathustra (4: 402). Certainly, this sun imagery is partly Nietzsche's, but the dynamic implied here, whereby this sun-like individualism is "idealistic," or metaphysically incorrect, is already extensively developed in *Tantalus*. This idealism and *Tantalus* are further connected through Ivanov's definition of idealism as a state where a person considers themselves to be the source and owner of the surrounding world (4: 418), leading to the same problem of loneliness in abundance that Ivanov had already depicted in the tragedy. His description of Dostoevsky's metaphysical dialogism,[43] which is based on the idea of ego death in ritual ecstasy, unsurprisingly comes out of Ivanov's study of the Dionysus cult. *Tantalus'*s creative elaboration on this concept of a single identity in dialogue with itself, though, is far more detailed than any of the early essays like "Nietzsche and Dionysus." *Tantalus'*s recurrent insistence on the shared essence of its characters thus transforms what was only implied in Dostoevsky to the level of an explicit statement, which is subsequently applied to Dostoevsky himself.

The same holds true for Ivanov's assessment of the significance of the earth, which concludes "Novel-Tragedy." Ivanov's description of Earth as a feminine metaphysical principle in *Demons* reiterates imagery from *Tantalus*: the earth, as embodied by Maria Timofeevna, awaits its true husband (Christ) and in the meantime comes to know the "sad glory of his double and empty throne, the visible sun" ("grustnoi slave ego dvoinika i pustogo prestola, zrimogo solntsa") (4: 436), whom Ivanov identifies as Stavrogin. Ivanov's symbolic reading, though, is again adapted from *Tantalus*, where Tantalus's rebellion is symbolized by an illusory, endless procession of visible suns, his downfall is symbolized by the "night sun" of Christ-Dionysus, and the earth remains an enigmatic and unfulfilled figure. In short, we see something of a feedback loop between *Tantalus* and Dostoevsky—the tragedy itself draws on Dostoevsky's own thematic structures, but the specific forms that these symbols take in the tragedy also rehearse and inform Ivanov's subsequent critical pronouncements on the author.

Conclusion

Tantalus did not find a wide audience when it was published, and plans to stage it never came to fruition (Lahti 153). Ivanov's Symbolist peers, however, received it enthusiastically. Aleksandr Blok and Andrei Bely were both highly taken by the tragedy at the time (Toporov 91); Bely came close to fighting a duel with another critic in defense of the work (Bogomolov 140). In this context, Ivanov's later valorization of the tragedy is not as odd as it

43. "Your being is experienced by me, as my own is, or: through your being I come to know myself as existing. Es, ergo sum" ("'tvoe bytie perezhivaetsia mnoiu, kak moe', ili: 'tvoim bytiem ia poznaiu sebia sushchim'. Es, ergo sum") (4: 419).

might seem, and it does not follow from its arcane references and experimentalism that *Tantalus* was meant to be detached from the greater context of Russian literary history. After all, Ivanov's assessment of *Tantalus* appears specifically in the context of a discussion about which first-rate works of Russian literature had appeared after Dostoevsky (Al'tman 27). The tragedy's author, then, considered it to be a text in dialogue with a broader literary tradition, as well as a window into imagined pre-history. As I have maintained, the symbolic language that *Tantalus* cultivates resonates with Dostoevsky's novels and recurs in Ivanov's later work on the author. The tragedy also stands on its own, however, as a fascinating, progressive artistic experiment.

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ABSTRACT

Viacheslav Ivanov is well-known as a Symbolist poet and literary theorist, but relatively little attention has been paid to his activity as a dramatist. Ivanov's first tragedy, *Tantalus* (published in 1905), was warmly received by contemporaries like Andrei Bely and Aleksandr Blok, and the author himself considered the play a central work within his oeuvre. It is thus worthy of renewed attention. To that end, this essay analyzes a symbolic gestalt developed within the tragedy that associates agricultural language and the image of the earth with parenthood, divine retribution, and a Dionysian understanding of death and resurrection. This approach sheds new light on many of the tragedy's more cryptic utterances. It clarifies the motivations of both Tantalus and his son Broteas, who are unwittingly trapped within a mythical cycle of rebellion against their fathers. When considered within the framework of this "foundational myth," the enigmatic goddess Adrastea's role as an embodiment of both vengeance and the earth also becomes clearer. *Tantalus* ultimately emerges as a successful creative embodiment of Ivanov's early theories of Symbolism and mythopoesis. I conclude by considering the rhetorical and conceptual relationship between *Tantalus* and Ivanov's later analyses of the novels of Fyodor Dostoevsky, arguing that the tragedy both adapts the symbolism of the novelist's later works and rehearses the concepts found within Ivanov's subsequent critical intervention.