

ERIGON AND HERMES: A COMPARATIVE JUNGIAN AND LACANIAN PSYCHOANALYSIS OF IDENTITY, SPIRITUALITY, GUIDANCE, AND TRANSFORMATION

Anita Dimitrijovska-Jankulovska¹, Milica Denkovska¹

¹MIT University – Skopje, e-mail: adimitrijovska@gmail.com, milica.denkovska@gmail.com

Abstract: This paper presents a comparative psychoanalytic study of Jordan Plevnesh's avant-garde drama *Erigon* (1982) and the figure of Hermes from Greek mythology, focusing on themes of identity, spirituality, guidance, and transformation. Using Jungian and Lacanian frameworks, the analysis interprets *Erigon*'s protagonist, Isidor Solunski, and his canine alter ego as manifestations of archetypal and unconscious dynamics, including the shadow, the Self, individuation, and the mirror stage. The study highlights how *Erigon* functions as a modernized psychopomp and trickster, paralleling Hermes's role as messenger, guide of souls, and liminal boundary-crosser. Jungian theory reveals *Erigon*'s journey as a paradoxical individuation culminating in death-as-transcendence, while Lacanian theory elucidates the fragmentation of identity across the Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real registers, and the perpetual pursuit of desire. The comparison demonstrates that both *Erigon* and Hermes embody transformational processes that dissolve boundaries between life and death, human and animal, and individual and collective identity. By merging mythic archetypes with postmodern dramaturgy, Plevnesh reimagines the Hermes figure as a vehicle for cultural and spiritual renewal in a fractured European landscape.

Keywords: *Erigon*, *Hermes*, *Jungian psychoanalysis*, *Lacanian psychoanalysis*, *archetype*.

Field: Humanities

1. INTRODUCTION

Jordan Plevnesh's avant-garde drama *Erigon* (1982) reimagines classical themes through a surreal, symbolic narrative. Critics call *Erigon* a "stage anathema" and "theatrical surrealistic fantasy" that shatters the conventions of Macedonian drama. Plevnesh himself invokes mythic motifs – he named the play after the ancient river *Erigon* (Crna Reka) in his homeland and populates it with charged imagery (e.g. a black dog named *Erigon* and its human counterpart Isidor Solunski). This paper applies Jungian and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory to interpret *Erigon*'s psychology and symbolism, and contrasts it with the figure of Hermes from Greek myth. In mythology, Hermes serves as messenger, trickster, and psychopomp (guide of souls) between worlds. By exploring *Erigon* and Hermes side by side, we illuminate themes of identity, spirituality, guidance, and transformation in both works, using Jungian concepts (archetype, shadow, Self, individuation) and Lacanian ideas (mirror stage, Symbolic/Imaginary/Real registers, desire). We draw on Plevnesh's dramaturgy and recent literary criticism and on psychoanalytic scholarship to ground our analysis.

2. METHODS

This study is a qualitative psychoanalytic literary analysis. We examine the text of Plevnesh's *Erigon* (original 1982 play and translations) alongside classical accounts of Hermes, interpreting symbols, character arcs, and dialogues through Jungian and Lacanian lenses. Jungian theory posits universal archetypes (e.g. the trickster, the Shadow, the Self) embedded in the collective unconscious. We identify such archetypal patterns in Plevnesh's characters and plot. Jung also theorized individuation as the process of integrating unconscious and conscious aspects into a unified Self; we consider whether *Erigon*/Isidor's journey reflects this process. Lacanian theory contributes complementary tools: the mirror stage (formation of the ego via misrecognized images) and the tripartite registers – Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real – that structure subjectivity. Lacan's mirror stage (the ego as an "other") and the Imaginary explain characters' self-image and fantasies, while the Symbolic (language, law, social code) and Real (unsymbolizable trauma or jouissance) illuminate conflicts between societal structures and inexpressible drives. Lacanian analysis has been fruitfully applied to literature, as in studies using the mirror stage and Symbolic/Real registers to read character identity and silences in narrative. Accordingly, our method is to read *Erigon*'s narrative and imagery in light of these psychoanalytic approaches, comparing *Erigon*'s

¹Corresponding author: adimitrijovska@gmail.com



role to Hermes's mythical functions (psychopomp, trickster, messenger) and examining how Jung/Lacanian concepts manifest in each. Where possible, we corroborate interpretations with scholarly insights on myth, psychoanalysis, and dramatic symbolism.

3. DISCUSSION

Erigon's psyche and symbolic world

In Plevnesh's play, the protagonist Isidor Solunski – a Macedonian actor – embarks on a grotesque odyssey through 20th-century Europe accompanied by his black dog, Erigon. (Notably, Erigon is given meaning as "man in flight," linking the dog's name to both the ancient river and a fugitive condition.). The play interweaves reality, dream and myth: Isidor recounts visions (e.g. the Apostle Paul commanding him to spread Christ's message through Europe) as he tours Europe's theatres. Ultimately, the narrative culminates at a surreal "European Congress of Dog Rights and Freedoms," where Solunski is executed by an Orwellian council of dog-parties while the dog Erigon – impregnating a German witch named Erinia – survives. The final image, Madame Dubois, Owner of the Institute for Bathing the Dead in Paris, Collector of Dead Bodies, Dogs, and Ideals, in an attempt to marry dead Isidor, kisses him, haunting declaration: "Now we are alone and thus dead!". Psychologically, Erigon is a journey of split identity and extreme transformation. Isidor's split self is literalized: he exists both as a human actor and as the dog Erigon (his alter ego or companion). On one level, this can be read as a Shadow-theme: the dog embodies repressed, animalistic or subversive aspects of Isidor and, by extension, of Europe. Jung described the shadow as "the negative side of the personality" – all that one does not wish to acknowledge. Erigon the dog – wild, fertile, outside human law – projects what Solunski cannot be under societal order. In the play's framing, Solunski proclaims to the dog (and to himself): "From now on we are alone", underlining a merging of identities. Eventually Isidor and the dog share a final fate ("thus dead"), suggesting a dark individuation: unlike many narratives of self-realization, here wholeness is achieved only in a paradoxical death-embrace of conscious and unconscious parts.

This fantastical plot reflects Plevnesh's mythic dramaturgy. Critics note that he infuses Erigon with associative, "mythic and poetic images". The omnipresent motif of theatre itself – from prologue to epilogue – becomes a metaphor: Solunski's life is a play (the theatre as destiny or even fate). One scholar calls the play a "mythic model" where theatre itself becomes subject and world as play and dream. Indeed, Isidor's opening line ("Now we will be alone") is directed to Erigon, as if addressing an inner double. Through these surreal devices, Plevnesh stages a psychic confrontation with history and the self. The character's name, Solunski (from Thessaloniki), invokes martyrdom and apostolic mission, tying personal identity to collective "spiritual" destiny – Macedonia's role in "European idea". Thus Erigon/Isidor can be seen as a vehicle for Plevnesh's vision of cultural transformation: a figure who must die (or be "torn to pieces" at the Congress) to renew Macedonia's spiritual legacy in Europe.

Hermes: archetype of the guide and trickster

In Greek myth, Hermes is a complex symbol. He is the psychopomp (the conductor of souls to Hades), the messenger god of Olympus, and a notorious trickster and boundary-crosser. In Jungian terms, Hermes embodies an archetype of transformation and communication. He "mediates between the unconscious and conscious realms" – guiding souls and also messages. Jungian writers often identify Hermes (and his Roman counterpart Mercury) with the process of integration: as quaternity figure, he joins opposites and assists the ego's passage to a higher Self. Jung alludes to gods like Hermes when discussing the unconscious's images. Notably, one Jungian analyst observes that the trickster quality of Hermes offers "audacity and cunning," and in myth gave figures like Pandora boldness – reinforcing the Shadow-like or boundary-breaking aspect.

Hermes's qualities have clear resonances with Plevnesh's Erigon. Like Hermes, the black dog Erigon acts as a guide of souls – though invertedly. He leads the playwright-poet and the audience through Europe's moral decay (the "perverse, decadent" Europe of the 20th century toward a kind of post-mortem reckoning. After Solunski's execution, Erigon impregnates Erinia (a German spiritual figure); this act of regeneration and the final union of Erigone and Solunski in death mirrors the psychopomp motif of rebirth and passage to another realm. Furthermore, both Hermes and Plevnesh's protagonist serve as transitional figures between cultures. Hermes moves freely between Olympian and mortal worlds, and between life and death, just as Solunski/Erigon traverses national borders (Macedonia, France, German landscapes) and ontological borders (life vs death, human vs animal). Indeed, Erigon includes prophetic dreams (the Apostle Paul) that explicitly cast Isidor as bringing a "Christ's joyful message" through Europe, echoing Hermes's role as divine messenger.

In Jungian language, both Erigon and Hermes enact the archetype of the Self-in-becoming.

Jung defines the Self as the totality of the psyche, whose goal of individuation is unity of conscious and unconscious. Erigon's narrative can be seen as a distorted path toward that unity. The dog (Erigon) and actor (Solunski) eventually coalesce: Plevnesh stages their merger as both literal (one body in two parts) and symbolic (their final spoken unity). This finale – where “the person recognizes their own self-worth and uniqueness and embraces both the conscious and the unconscious” – is twisted into a vision of death as transcendence. Hermes's own symbolism is similarly about unification: traditionally, Hermes unites heaven and earth, psyche and Logos. His caduceus (staff) famously entwines snakes, suggesting the union of opposites. In this way, Erigon can be read as a Hellenistic homage: the dual-natured hero who, like Hermes, completes a dangerous journey and merges with the sacred (“Christ's message”) in a figurative transformation.

Jungian archetypes – shadow and Self

From a Jungian perspective, Erigon heavily invokes the Shadow archetype. The dog Erigon represents the “animal side” of Solunski and of the collective psyche. Erigon's primal instincts and defiance of social order embody what the human characters repress or reject. Jung noted the Shadow contains the “inferiorities” one denies; in Erigon, the execution of Solunski (and the dog's primal act of impregnating the witch) could be seen as the liberation of this violent potential. Madam Dibua's final cry – “Now we are alone and thus dead!” – underscores a frightening catharsis: the ego (Isidor's persona) can only be free of conflict when all identity is dissolved into the unconscious (death).

By contrast, the Self-archetype in Jungian theory aims for wholeness. The play seems to invert this ideal: the union of Solunski with Erigon is consummated only through destruction. One might say Plevnesh radicalizes individuation: rather than gradual integration, Solunski's identity is forcibly split and then extinguished. Yet the implicit message (and Plevnesh's interest in Macedonian destiny) is that from this violent end, a new collective Self might emerge – much as Hermes's journey across worlds yields renewal (Hermes often presides over commerce, learning, culture). The explicit motif of resurrection (“thus he revived [Macedonia] to life” via Europe) in Solunski's dream suggests hope that the “death” of the old ego will transform into a spiritual rebirth for a nation. Jungians would note this as a mythical enactment of Self: death and renewal as a single process of achieving a higher state of being.

Lacanian analysis – mirror, Symbolic, Real, desire.

Lacan's ideas shed further light on the imagery of split identity and catastrophe. The mirror stage – where the infant first misrecognizes itself in a coherent mirror image – establishes the ego as an Other. In Erigon, one could analogize Solunski encountering his dog as encountering his mirror double: Erigon is both beloved companion and disturbing “other” self. Solunski's repeated address to Erigon (“we are alone”) hints that his ego (Imaginary self-image) depends on an “alter-ego” relationship. As Lacan writes, the ego is essentially an alienated image – “me” is always an other (le petit autre). In this way of analyzing the playwright under the Lacanian theory, Solunski's self cannot be whole until his dog-Other vanishes (or, rather, both vanish into the Real). The mirror stage thus frames the tragedy: Solunski's identity is destined to shatter, since it was constructed in relation to a misrecognized image (the dog as mirrored man) from the start.

The Symbolic order (language, law, cultural norms) looms large in Erigon. The play is laced with references to official discourse: congresses, court sentences, pronouncements in French and German, all set on a theatre stage. Lacan defines the Symbolic as the network of signifiers (e.g. legal codes, political ideologies) that give structure to subjectivity. Here, the “Dog Rights” Congress and its kangaroo court symbolize the grotesque exterior reality that Solunski navigates. These structures are the law of the land – in Lacanian terms, the Big Other. Yet they are fundamentally absurd (Orwellian puppets of power), signifying that the Symbolic order is corrupt or false. For example, Erinia's execution order and the dog panels mimic human justice but pervert it. Lacan might say this is a Symbolic system that has lost touch with the subject's true demands, forcing the protagonists into the Real – what Lacan calls what “resists symbolization”. Indeed, the Real in Erigon emerges as the violence and chaos that symbols cannot assimilate: Solunski's torture, the execution, and the dismemberment of Erigon are events beyond rational discourse – they are the traumatic “Real” that shatters the characters' illusions.

The Imaginary register – fantasy, images, mirror illusions – pervades the play as well. Scenes of dream-visions and symbolic doubling are Imaginary structures: Solunski dreaming of Paul, the actor playing a dog, Erinia's transformation, all create an illusory reality. Lacan noted the Imaginary is fictional yet necessary. In Erigon, the Imaginary sustains the narrative but also perpetuates the ego's misrecognitions. Only by confronting the Real horror (the bloody final tableau) can the Imaginary charade collapse.

Finally, desire in the Lacanian sense – desire of the Other – operates beneath the surface. Every character is entwined by the unsatisfied wants of Others. Solunski seeks to realize a national-mythical dream (his sense of mission is infused with his mother Macedonia's desire for recognition). Erigone (the

dog figure) seeks sexual object (Erinia), a libidinal act that Lacan would see as chasing an objet petit a – the unattainable object-cause of desire. Erinia's womb becomes a locus of desire (she says "How beautiful death is, Erigone!" before his sacrifice), suggesting a link between sexual union and existential transformation. In Lacanian terms, both human and canine characters are caught in circular substitutive quests – the lover's desire for the beloved's love, the colonizing Other's desire for control – that can never be fully satisfied. The play's resolution ("we are dead") poignantly underscores Lacan's idea that all desire is marked by lack: the one moment of consummation is a cessation of life itself.

Hermes vs. Erigon: synthesis of guidance and transformation.

Both Hermes and Erigon function as guides through liminal spaces. Hermes guides souls to the afterlife and travelers across boundaries; Erigon leads the audience (via Solunski) through a moral underworld and toward death-as-redemption. Spiritually, Hermes's role as psychopomp directly parallels Erigon's journey: as Jung noted, the psychopomp archetype mediates between unconscious and conscious realms, just as Solunski (a conscious "actor") is constantly confronted with unconscious visions and ultimately merges with death. Thematically, Erigon echoes Hermes's trickster aspect. Erigon (the dog) is cunning and subversive – impregnating a witch, infiltrating human institutions – undermining the "straight" order. Jung wrote that archetypal tricksters (like Hermes or Loki) "bring audacity and cunning" to upend normality, and Plevnesh's Erigon similarly unsettles the European status quo.

4. CONCLUSION

Finally, both characters embody transformation. Hermes is a liminal god: god of transitions, commerce, and magical change. In mythology he moves fluidly between states (life/death, god/man) and initiates metamorphoses (e.g. stealing Apollo's cattle, inventing music and language). Erigon's narrative is itself a series of transformations – Isidor transforms from artist to martyr to myth, and even the name Erigone (used by characters in the play) suggests rebirth (Erigone being a mythic daughter of Icarus in Greek lore). Jungian analysis would identify this as a cycle of death and rebirth: Solunski's ultimate "death" on stage and Erigone's pregnancy symbolize the regeneration of spirit. Lacan would note that the Real blow – the final annihilation of all signifiers ("we are dead") – paradoxically yields a new Symbolic for the characters: a state beyond life. In both Erigon and Hermes's myth, identity is not static but journey-like: one must traverse darkness (the underworld of psyche or dog-congress) to attain a new kind of wholeness.

In conclusion, Plevnesh's Erigon and mythic Hermes share archetypal functions. Using Jungian and Lacanian concepts, we see Erigon as a modern reinvention of the Hermes-figure: a guide of lost souls, a trickster who dissolves boundaries, and a catalyst for inner transformation. The comparisons illuminate how Erigon dramatizes universal psychic processes – the confrontation with shadow, the fragmentation and potential reunion of the self, and the perpetual desire driving human (and canine) actions – within a culturally specific but globally resonant myths.

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