

**UNIVERSITY OF MEDICINE, PHARMACY, SCIENCE AND
TEHNOLOGY „GEORGE EMIL PALADE” OF TÂRGU MUREŞ**
DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF LETTERS, HUMANISTIC AND APPLIED SCIENCES
FIELD: PHILOLOGY

DOCTORAL THESIS
- SUMMARY -

SCIENTIFIC COORDINATOR:
Prof. Univ. Dr. Dorin ŞTEFĂNESCU

PhD Student:
Oana Codruţa BEJAN (PINTILIE)

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THE INITIATORY JOURNEY IN CHILDREN’S LITERAURE

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Through the doctoral thesis entitled *The initiatory journey in children's literature*, we aim to carry out an approach from a multidisciplinary perspective to the theme of the initiatory journey in children's literature, capitalizing on what has been said essentially in the research fields for this purpose and trying new and personal points of view on the subject. By *children's literature* we prefer to understand the cult fairy tale, since this is the literary species of the epic genre with the widest spread when we analyze the preferences of young readers, deliberately leaving aside other literary species, from the category of lyrical or dramatic genres, which we consider minor in the present context. The *cult fairy tale* is represented by that broad narrative structure, populated by characters loaded with symbolic values, involving the use of the fantastic and fabulous actions. The cult fairy tale partly preserves the dialogue of the folk tale and the narrative pattern, but the specific stereotypical events are organized according to the artistic vision and style of the author. By *classic fairy tales* we refer to well-known premodern fairy tales by some authors from the era of the great classics in Romania (Ion Creangă, Ioan Slavici) or by European fairy tale collectors-authors (Charles Perrault, Brothers Grimm).

The purpose of this research is to make correlations between rites of passage, myths and literature to demonstrate that in the fairy tale, in one form or another, more or less veiled, the essential components of the myth, but also of historical and ritual realities are preserved over time in various forms and in different proportions. We propose to apply, with certain reservations, the archaic ritual scheme in the fairy tale and to replicate the fundamental elements of the mythical hero's adventure in a number of fairy tales that we consider representative for the direction of the present thesis, but also to demonstrate that the fairy tale hero hides (none other than) man himself in a constant attempt to decipher the mysteries of the world and search for self and the meaning of existence, defined by his aspirations and fantasies, embarked on the journey of life. The *main objective* of the doctoral thesis is to prove that initiation can guarantee, to a certain extent, the evolution of the fairy tale hero through the process of inner metamorphosis or through the change of social status.

The doctoral thesis is divided into four chapters, as follows: Chapter 1 *Rites of passage, Gateway to Perfection. Conceptual Foundations*, Chapter 2 *Male Initiations. Representative Classic Fairy Tales*, Chapter 3 *Female Initiations. Representative Classic Fairy Tales*, Chapter 4 *Reinventing Children's Literature. Initiations in Modern Fairy Tales*.

The introductory, theoretical chapter of the thesis is followed by three chapters that contain a series of analyzes based on cult fairy tales from Romanian and universal literature, premodern and modern fairy tales. Even if every fairy tale involves going through trials that lead, in the end, to a transformation of the protagonist, the choice of literary works interpreted in this thesis necessarily took into account the existence of a concrete road, a journey during which the hero or the heroine to pass trials of initiation as diverse as possible in order to demonstrate that, whatever the methods of initiation, in the end, the hero gets to climb the steps of perfection, to go through the expected existential transformation or to change his social status and to reach the highest social level by marrying an emperor's daughter or son. We approach the theme of the protagonist's path of initiation from the perspective of the existential questions he asks himself, from the perspective of the hero's particular searches, which can be searches for self or for the truth, initiation always proving to be, fundamentally, a process of inner metamorphosis and personal perfection, the methods of achieving this transformation being different each time. Although in literature and in everyday reality initiatory journeys do not always have a positive end, in fairy tales the initiation usually has the expected result. Among the selection criteria of the fairy tales analyzed is the relevance of the literary work, using well-known, but also less famous fairy tales, but also the characteristics of the hero, especially his origin and the moment when the path of initiation begins. Thus, we have chosen heroes with different origins, concretely with royal origin followed from adolescence until the moment of crossing the threshold of initiation (Harap Alb), heroes on the threshold of adolescence who are preparing for the transition to adult life (Fetița din Floare, Erus, The Little Prince), heroes with humble origins (Băiet Sărac, Florița din Codru, Fata moșneagului) and heroes followed from childhood, regardless of their origin (Hänsel and Gretel, Little Red Riding Hood).

The stages of initiation in fairy tales are not represented by a simple inventory of the borderline situations that the character goes through, but, in order to have a more comprehensive view of his evolution, we intend to present all the component elements of the transformation process among which we can find the hero's quests, then the initiating masters, the hero's auxiliaries, the anti-heroes, the weapons and helpful items, the struggles that take place both internally and externally to reach the final stage of refinement. Along with these aspects, we will try to decode the hidden meanings of the texts and the actions of the characters to see if, in the end, the intended transformation has occurred and to what extent it has been achieved.

In conclusion, we propose to complete the research with a synthetic comparative analysis of some of the component elements of the transformation process in the analyzed fairy tales by comparing the premodern works with the modern ones. We consider the hero's quests, the master initiates, the hero's auxiliaries, the anti-heroes, the supporting weapons and items, the internal and external struggles to reach the final stage of refinement. Even if every fairy tale analyzed involves crossing thresholds that ultimately lead to a transformation of the protagonist, although we have demonstrated the fact that, whatever the methods of initiation, in the end, the hero ends up climbing the steps of perfection, going through the metamorphosis targeted existential or manages to change his social status and reach the highest social level by marrying a daughter or an emperor, we must bear in mind that the cult fairy tale, by the fact that it mirrors the author's vision and integrates themes and motifs characteristic of his work, reflect the periods in which they were written, promote different moral values, are intended for a different audience, according to the mutation of the expectation horizon, demonstrating the modification and evolution of the values of societies over time. Thus, it is clear that all the elements that support the unfolding of the initiation conform, to a certain extent, to the time in which the fairy tale was written or bear the influence of the folk tale in which it originates. We will note that fairy tale heroes do not reach absolutely all stages of initiation, as they are described in the work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* written by researcher Joseph Campbell, who proposes and analyzes the theory of the archetypal hero's journey found in most mythologies of the world, called the monomyth (Campbell distinguishes 17 separate stages in the hero's journey). However, in any fairy tale that reveals an initiatory path, we can recognize a minimum of stages, namely departure - initiation - return that overlap the stages of the rites of passage that Arnold van Gennep talks about: separation or preliminary (separation) rites of limit or liminality (threshold or passage proper) and rites of aggregation or postliminality (aggregation or reintegration). We will notice that the methods by which the objectives of the fairy tale are accomplished are very diverse and, most of the time, different from one period to another. However, we can say that the fairy tale has been preserved throughout time, one of the fundamental principles of humanity, namely that good always defeats evil and that the fairy tale has always dealt with the most frequent conflict situations of the society in which it was written, aspiring to a more or less reproving educational effect. It can also be distinguished that in the fairy-tale hero, in whatever period he falls, hides (none other than) the man himself who is constantly trying to

decipher the mysteries of the world and search for the self and the meaning of existence, defined of his aspirations and fantasies, embarked on the journey of life.