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PhD Candidate:

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PROMINENT STRATEGIES OF INITIATION IN CONTEMPORARY ROMANIAN NOVELS

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SUMMARY

We proposed in our thesis entitled *Prominent Strategies of Initiation in Contemporary Romanian Novels* to carry out a hermeneutic reading of the strategies of initiation. We call initiation any ontological transformation of a man or a character or the change of his social status that was achieved with the help of a liminal experience. We traced the component stages of the initiation process along with the strategy used by the initiator. All this helped us to offer a new perspective on the ontological transformations that the characters experience within an initiation process.

The general objective of our thesis is to demonstrate that initiation processes ensure the ontological transformation of characters and – in some cases – the change of their social status. The general objective is complemented by several secondary objectives. The first objective of this type is to decipher the secondary meanings of the symbols that contribute at the textual level to the initiation process and to its endowment with multiple meanings. The second goal is to present the significance of the characters' behavior within the initiation in order to have a much broader perspective on the transformations they will undergo at the end of the initiation. Through the third secondary objective we aim to establish the nature and/or efficiency of the strategy used during the initiation process.

To be able to achieve these objectives we used a series of methods. Without these methods the realization of our research would not have been possible. Hermeneutics occupied a leading place among the methods used. The primary methodology is complemented by several secondary methods that enable a much more nuanced interpretation. We used the methods proposed by the research in the field of psychology to be able to highlight the functions of symbols in the economy of the text, considering the theories of Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung. We also considered the Jungian theory of initiation developed by Victor Turner and Robert L. Moore.

The actuality of our research lies in the direct relationship between initiation processes in our daily lives and their representations in literature. After the fundamental liminal experience of birth, each human goes through a long series of initiation processes or rituals that form their

personal and professional identity. Our initiations always take place in an ambiguous context: none of us knows when and where the next initiation will take place, or what effect it will have on our being. Neither do the characters in the novels under consideration know what other liminal experiences await them after the initiation process they have just passed through, nor do we know what other experiences, thresholds, or initiation processes await us, and this constant ambiguity makes continuous change possible, since, as we will see in the case of the characters, in moments of ambiguity and uncertainty, the nuanced discovery of the world is possible. Thus, we can say that initiation processes follow each other throughout a person's life until death or perhaps even after. So, the relevance of our research lies in the importance of understanding the processes that cause change in the world we live in. The human being is the main agent of change that operates bidirectionally in relation to the world: the human being changes, and after changing, he tries to change the world around him. The increasing speed with which change is taking place in the world and in man alike entails the risk of getting lost in the many changes around us without realizing which direction we are heading. We believe that it is essential to understand the changes that are happening around us, and the proposed initiation theory can be a way to achieve this goal.

Regarding the classification of initiation strategies, we will refer to two main categories: strong and weak. Strong strategies are those that have a more concrete character, all the stages, the components of the initiation and the person of the initiator can be clearly defined, and the strategy itself has a finality that cannot be questioned in any way. In addition, strong initiations are not limited to producing a change in the character's being, but often leave visible marks on the character's body. Strong initiations, even if they take place in the modern period, are close in vision and intensity to premodern initiation rituals, but it is important to bear in mind that they are not identical to them, only similar. Strong strategies are completed successfully in most cases, the possibility of getting stuck in a moment of chronic liminality is reduced. Among the initiation processes present in the novels proposed for the applicative part of our work, those signed by Octavian Soviany and Ioana Pârvulescu present strong initiation processes. We mention, for example, the initiation of the character Kostas Venetis from the novel *Viața lui Kostas Venetis* by Octavian Soviany and that of Jonah from the novel *Prevestirea* by Ioana Pârvulescu. The two processes are eloquent examples to be able to illustrate what a strong initiation means: Kostas

Venetis goes through an initiation process that results in a deep ontological change in his being, but the change is also signaled by the mark that the initiation leaves on his body. Similarly, Jonah undergoes a fundamental ontological change following the liminal experience in the belly of the fish, and this is externally visible due to the scales that appear on his body.

We have structured our thesis in five chapters. The first chapter contains the theoretical elements that we used during the research, and the other four chapters each present an initiation strategy. All three novels that represent the research material in the chapter *Inițiere eroică prin coborâre în Infern* are signed by Octavian Soviany, and two of them – *Arhivele de la Monte Negro* and *Viața lui Kostas Venetis* – represent an actual descent into Hell of the main character, while the third, *Moratea lui Sigfried*, presents the moral degradation of the character until he reaches a hellish state. Hell refers, in this case, to the environment in which the characters' initiation takes place. For Kostas Venetis, hell represents the community of characters from the lower strata of society among which he constantly live; the narrator character in *Arhivele de la Monte Negro* ends up in the hell created by the strict rules and unnatural characters of the sanitarium where he is hospitalized, and Siegfried ends up in the same space due to the war. Regardless of the direction of the initiation processes of these characters they will either succeed in escaping from that environment or become part of it depending on the purpose of the initiation. Initiation by descent can be carried out bidirectionally: either the descent is carried out with the aim of the rebirth of the character, which is equivalent to a positive initiation, or the descent aims to close the neophyte in hell, in which case we can speak of negative initiation.

The strategy of initiation through discovery identified in the three chosen novels of Ioana Pârvulescu, *Viața începe vineri*, *Inocenții*, *Prevestirea*, is unidirectional and can be directed exclusively towards the positive pole. Discovery belongs, along with the descent into hell, to the category of the oldest strategies of initiation, therefore it can be considered extremely effective. Whether we are talking about the discovery of a world or the discovery of divine force, it provides access to knowledge and integration into the world. Consequently, the strategy of discovery gives the neophyte the opportunity to know more, thus contributing to his personal development and strengthening his identity or, in some cases, forming a new identity that will be a solid foundation for his entire subsequent existence. Both the children from *Inocenții* and the character Dan Crețu

from *Viața începe vineri* discover a new world and form an identity that will represent the basis of their existence in the new environment. Being a pre-modern strategy, its efficiency is considerable, a fact also proven by the finality of the three initiation processes that we are going to talk about.

Amantul colivăresei, Mirii Nemuririi, Drumu-I lung, căldura mare by Radu Aldulescu place the initiation processes of the characters in the immediate vicinity of our days. The efficiency of the strategy of limiting the being seems to be reduced, but we cannot consider it totally ineffective, that is, it generates a predominantly negative finality. Mite's transformation in the novel *Amantul colivăresei* is successfully completed, as are Daniel's and Florența's, but success is solely about avoiding failure of the initiation process. Their new social environment and their new identity do not represent an advantage from the perspective of their future existence, on the contrary, Mite's life as a "Soviet dog" and Florența's life as a nun are guarantees of losing the chance to live in favorable existential conditions. The characters in *Mirii nemuririi* cannot hope to improve their lives either, but unlike the characters in the other novels, initiation doesn't help them either. The blocking of the initiation process means for them the beginning of a chronic liminality that superimposes on their already rather obscure existence as an additional burden.

The last chapter, *Inițierea teatrală*, is dedicated to some initiation processes that take place nowadays. The strategy indicated by the title is the most recent of those discussed in our research, therefore it has the weakest strength. The weakening of the initiation strategies is visible both in the disappearance of physical signs and in the weak result. The efficiency of this strategy is high, but the weakened force is noted by the lack of deep transformation. Judging based on the theories proposed and the criteria elaborated in the first chapter of our work, we can state that each initiation process in the novels *Efectele secundare ale vieții*, *Șapte Octombrie* and *Supraviețuire* by Vlad Zografi was completed, the neophytes went through all the stages of initiation and passed through one or more liminal experiences. However, the existential state of suspension that the characters acquire cannot be considered a transformation as obvious and nuanced as those produced by premodern strategies. The result of this strategy – suspension – approaches chronic liminality, but the two concepts are not identical for two reasons. First of all, the characters go through all the stages of the initiation, which proves to us that the initiation is over, and thus we cannot speak of the process being blocked or bogged down. The second reason that prevents us from placing the

sign of equality between the two concepts is that the transformation of the characters has been completed, and the changes of social status and existential condition have taken place. We can consider this strategy to be effective, but we must note that its effectiveness is fragile, exposed to a permanent danger, put in crisis by the possibility that the process of initiation could get bogged down in chronic liminality at any moment.