

EXTRAORDINARY BODIES IN LIVIU REBREANU'S *ION*. A READING THROUGH THE LENS OF DISABILITY STUDIES

In Search of a Title

In this essay, I would like to share some thoughts on the possible added value of reading Liviu Rebreanu's novel *Ion* (1920) through the lens of so-called "Disability Studies". Disability Studies is a social sciences and humanities academic field that emerged in the American academia in the 1990s. Before, it was mainly the practical sciences focusing on concrete interventions that would favor individuals with impairments who had limited access to societal opportunities and resources¹. Activists demanded attention to the topic. They admitted that the notion of "disability" functioned as a kind of container, having stemmed mainly from the need to construct a collective identity "to make change possible, to break down discrimination in jobs, transport, in people's attitudes generally" as claimed by author Peter White, who was blind himself. Otherwise, he could wonder what makes him comparable to a man in a wheelchair and ask himself "whether putting me into a disabled category really makes much sense"².

Meanwhile, researchers using the advanced academic approach of Cultural or Critical Disability Studies³ emphasize the fact that "impairment is a common

¹ I refer here to the emerging rehabilitation sciences in the historical context of the 1970s and 1980s. The study and discussion of disability, also in scientific terms as a whole, have a much longer history in many different individual disciplines, which cannot be discussed in detail here (for an overview, see Anne Waldschmidt, *Disability Studies zur Einführung*, Hamburg, Junius Hamburg, 2020, pp. 17-20). However, it should be remembered that "interventions" did take place earlier in the opposite direction – e.g., in the context of nationalistic "Völkerkunde" and eugenics, resulting, as a catastrophic climax, in the de facto genocide of people who were physically or mentally impaired, euphemistically called "euthanasia", in the German Third Reich.

² Peter White, "Disability: A New History", *BBC Radio 4*, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/-programmes/b021-mdwt/episodes/player>. Accessed June 10, 2024. See also Rachel Adams, Benjamin Reiss, David Serlin (eds.), *Keywords for Disability Studies*, New York, New York University Press, 2015, p. 6.

³ A major critique of the first wave of disability studies is that, although disability is no longer regarded as an individual medical problem, it is (still) conceptualized as a "deviation from the norm". From the perspective of Critical Disability Studies, however, the focus should be on "changing the social and political treatment of difference". See Markus Dederich, *Körper, Kultur und Behinderung. Eine Einführung in die Disability Studies*, Bielefeld, Transcript, 2007, pp. 30-31. Some authors also emphasise the activist character of research in this field – see Melinda C. Hall, "Critical Disability Theory", in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2019, <https://plato.sta->

experience in human life and that we all are differently able-bodied”⁴. Disability can be innate, caused by an accident or develop with age and, as such, affect every human at any time. However, in the majority of cases, the ascription “disabled” remains a variable category of difference, changing the fact to “a specific social identity of a minority”⁵. It is not surprising that this specific social and cultural discourse is of particular interest to many social sciences and humanities researchers. In this regard, they share certain assumptions with studies on race, class and gender/sexuality. They are also analytically inspired by the earlier focus on “otherness”⁶. Shared assumptions include the focus on socially constructed rather than natural or inherent identities, the examination of power dynamics involved in the construction and maintenance of these identities, the recognition of intersectionality in shaping the experiences and opportunities of marginalized groups and the critical analysis of societal norms and structures that perpetuate inequality and discrimination. These perspectives align closely with the social model of disability, which emphasizes that disability is primarily a result of societal barriers and attitudes rather than individual impairments. Beyond the ethical concerns (critical) disability scholars engage with, their primary focus is to explore the question “How, why and to what end is ‘otherness’ historically, socially and culturally produced, objectified and practiced as disability?”⁷.

For the title of my essay, I initially chose the term “deformed bodies”. By doing so, I used a notion that preceded contemporary conceptions of disability and “demarcated and degraded physical difference”⁸ on a more basic level. In my perception, the notion of “deformity”, originating in the 18th century, better reflected the perspective still prevalent when Rebreanu wrote the novel *Ion*. The word immediately characterizes the perspective of the contemporaries as well as the narrator’s voice in *Ion* – as the deviancy of the characters presented in this article is firstly and most explicitly exposed by their visible physical impairments and bodily particularities. These aspects make the notion of deformity seem to come much closer to the point of the (re)presentation. In relation to the concrete *Zeitgeist* of the novel’s context, it is worth considering the work of Marius Turda, who traces the way eugenic ideas gained momentum in Hungary and Romania in

[ford.edu/archives/win2019/entries/disability-critical](https://www.ford.edu/archives/win2019/entries/disability-critical). Accessed July 2, 2024. Unless otherwise stated, the quotations are translated into English by the author of this paper.

⁴ Anne Waldschmidt, “Disability Goes Cultural. The Cultural Model of Disability as an Analytical Tool”, in Moritz Ingwersen, Anne Waldschmidt, Hanjo Berressem (eds.), *Culture – Theory – Disability*, Bielefeld, Transcript-Verlag, 2017, p. 19.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ See David T. Mitchell, Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis. Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2000, p. 3.

⁷ Waldschmidt, *Disability Studies*, p. 12: “Wie, warum und wozu wird – historisch-sozial und kulturell – ‘Anderssein’ als Behinderung hergestellt, verobjektiviert und praktiziert?”

⁸ Helen Deutsch, “Deformity”, in Adams et al. (eds.), *Keywords*, p. 52.

the early 20th century. He points to the fact that “degeneration (in its multiple forms) came to be widely discussed”⁹, the “nation’s racial body” became protected¹⁰ and hence “eugenicists glorified the mentally and physically healthy while warning against those deemed inferior”¹¹. Therefore, several factors make it highly unlikely that the described contexts in *Ion* are not at least partially shaped by this contemporary context of ideas. Rebreanu, the novel’s author, originates from the then-Hungarian Transilvania, where his novel is also set. He was fluent in both Romanian and Hungarian. So, he was able to perceive in both languages the eugenic discourses that dealt with the fear of degeneration of one’s own “race” on the one hand, and with health as a necessary processor of modernization and national development on the other¹². And, indeed, going deeper into the character analysis in *Ion*, I became aware that Ion, the able-bodied main character, is such a dominant character also due to his physical strength. His body is described as almost super-naturally healthy and powerful. At the time the novel was written, health was understood as “a normative category operating in both medical and social environments”¹³. I will show later that this physical configuration is no coincidence but fits into a eugenic reading of *Ion*.

It made a lot of sense, though, to change the essay’s title to “extraordinary bodies” to integrate the presentation of his body and show the range of literary bodies, from weak to strong. With the term “extraordinary bodies”, I am also quoting Rosemarie Garland-Thomson’s important 1990s contribution to the field of disability studies¹⁴. The term very convincingly reflects the fluidity she addresses in her book of which we are also constantly reminded in the presented novel — “anyone can become disabled at any time”¹⁵. In the context of Henri-Jacques Stiker’s *History of Disability*, David T. Mitchell points to the fact “that

⁹ Marius Turda, *Eugenics and Nation in Early 20th Century Hungary*, Basingstoke–New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 30.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 41.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 44. Interestingly, disability is not (yet) a prominent topic. It is explicitly dealt with only in connection with war returnees when, in 1915, the Hungarian Prime Minister initiated a Welfare Committee for Disabled and Injured Soldiers (p. 180). Maria Bucur points to the absolute lack of attention paid to the topic of disability in Romanian politics and society as late as the 19th century, as well as the immense current research gap in the study of disability in Eastern Europe. She herself traces the topic of abled/disabled bodies using the example of the Romanian military, medical institutions and the first philanthropically motivated institutions founded in Romania between the turn of the century and the beginning of the First World War – see Maria Bucur, “Disability Discourses in Romania before 1916”, in *New Europe College Yearbook*, 2022-2023, vol. 1, pp. 41–65, <https://nec.ro/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/BUCUR.pdf>. Accessed November 3, 2024.

¹² Turda, *Eugenics and Nation*, pp. 25-33.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 27.

¹⁴ Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies. Figuring Physical Disability in American Culture and Literature*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2017.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 14.

human capacities vary greatly from one another and that those differences mark the dynamic essence of what it means to be human”¹⁶. By this, Stiker argues for a perspective of general human difference and against what Mitchell calls a “rhetoric of sameness” that does not recognize “the realities of disabled lives”¹⁷. It is, therefore, an inclusive concept. One could also say that particularities are gradually regarded as part of one and the same phenomenon of the general physical and mental conditionality of creaturely beings.

Disability in the Context of Literature

Investigating disability in the context of literature is relevant. Literature is full of characters who deviate from an assumed norm. Concerning Montaigne, Nietzsche, Shakespeare and Melville, Snyder and Mitchell convincingly point out that “disability is a prevalent characteristic of narrative discourses”¹⁸. It seems that disabled characters demand a meaningful narrative while they also enable an intriguing story. On the one hand, such fictional characters shape the reader’s idea of what it means to live or have to live “differently” in one respect or another¹⁹. On the other hand, in most cases, they are not the main characters of a plot, meaning that attention and empathy are focused on others. The narrating voice is not constructed to convey how it feels to be perceived as deviant and stigmatized. Instead, at decisive moments, it is directed by the mediating narrator into other realms occupied by non-disabled (main) characters. Most readers are not aware of this omnipresence: the disabled characters still play a marginalized or exoticized role that conforms to unquestioned cultural assumptions by a majority of seemingly unaffected people²⁰, the disabled characters do not stand out precisely because they *conform to* stereotyped ideas²¹.

Stereotypes extend beyond perceptions of disabled bodies. In every society, various groups face prejudice based on different aspects of their identity. Consequently, researchers have concluded that an intersectional perspective is essential to understanding and addressing these complex social dynamics. The notion of “intersectionality”, introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, points to double or multiple disadvantages when people combine several characteristics perceived by their societies as “different”. For instance, Crenshaw was a black

¹⁶ David T. Mitchell, “Foreword”, in Henri-Jacques Stiker, *A History of Disability*. Transl. by William Sayers, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1999, p. xiii.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. xii.

¹⁸ Mitchell, Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, p. 1.

¹⁹ See Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, p. 9: “The discursive construct of the disabled figure, informed more by received attitudes than by people’s actual experience of disability, circulates in culture and finds a home within the conventions and codes of literary representation”.

²⁰ See also *Ibidem*, p. 11.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

female feminist. As women and black people are both disadvantaged in American society, gender and race overlap and (can) result in a double burden²². Meanwhile, especially in gender studies, intersectionality is being discussed as a new paradigm²³, and Feminist Disability Studies has emerged as a sub-branch. Also, Garland-Thomson argues in favour of this intersectional perspective that productively expands the “thinking about the complexity of embodied identity”²⁴. In terms of the supposed existence of races²⁵, there is (even) historical evidence of discourses on eugenics and the hierarchization of human groups in general, closely accompanied by a discursive connection of supposedly “lower races” with attributions of disability²⁶. This should be kept in mind, as, in the novel *Ion*, we are also confronted by the multiple disadvantages of the physically impaired, as we will see below.

The first impulse towards the topic of diversity in Romanian literature (which can also serve as a starting point when analysing intersectionality) is the quantitative study “Identitarian Diversity in the Romanian Novel (1844-1932)”²⁷. The metadata the authors extracted while digitizing more than 500 novels provides a useful overview of the quantitative presence of authors’ and protagonists’ identity characteristics in Romanian novels. Gender, Ethnicity/Nationality and Class/Work are the routes of investigation. The authors did not search for disabled characters in the Romanian novel. Nevertheless, all of their categories will still play a role in the context of disability as presented in *Ion*. The novel is classified as the first modern novel in the Romanian literary realm, and, as Linett points out,

²² Crenshaw analyses this through the framing and interpretation of court cases in which black women are the plaintiffs. In doing so, she shows that there is absolutely no sensitivity to the relevance of intersectionality; instead, those who are “burdened” in multiple ways are marginalized – see Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics”, *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989,1, Article 8, <https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8>. Accessed July 31, 2024.

²³ Ilse Lenz, “Intersektionalität: zum Wechselverhältnis von Geschlecht und sozialer Ungleichheit”, in Ruth Becker, Beate Kortendiek, Barbara Budrich (eds.), *Handbuch Frauen- und Geschlechterforschung. Theorie, Methoden, Empirie*. Unter Mitarbeit von Barbara Budrich, Ilse Lenz, Sigrid Metz-Göckel, Ursula Müller und Sabine Schäfer. 3., erweiterte und durchgesehene Auflage, Wiesbaden, VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften / GWV Fachverlage GmbH, Wiesbaden, 2010, pp. 158-165.

²⁴ Garland-Thomson, *Feminist Disability Studies*, p. 1559.

²⁵ For the concept of race underlying this article, see the “Jena Declaration. The Concept of Race is the Result of Racism, not its Prerequisite”, <https://www.uni-jena.de/22120/jenaer-erklaerung>. Accessed August 02, 2024.

²⁶ Jamelia Morgan, “On the Relationship Between Race and Disability”, *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review (CR-CL)*, 2023, 58, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4519059>. Accessed July 27, 2024.

²⁷ Vlad Pojoga et al., “Diversitate identitară în romanul românesc (1844-1932)” [“Identitarian Diversity in the Romanian Novel (1844-1932)”, *Transilvania*, 2022, 10, pp. 33-44.

“modernist authors believed fiction should be expansive, even in some cases encyclopedic” so that “they included myriad human types in their fictional worlds”²⁸. In the following sections, I will introduce the physically impaired in more detail and examine them under the following questions: Which protagonists have “deformed bodies”, and what functions do their impairments and their characters – Linett refers to the “bodymind”²⁹ – have in the novel? What does the kind of representation tell us about the positionality of the narrator’s voice concerning persons with physical and/or mental impairments? Which major topics are (implicitly) negotiated when the characters’ bodies are presented in such detail? What is their symbolic content? I will argue that *Ion* is a suitable example to show the close link between disabled and enabled bodies in their reciprocal conditionality. In this sense, the Romanian identity at the time the novel is set is also multifaceted, with each body illustrating a partial facet. I will start by presenting the relevant characters and develop the argument in each concrete case.

Savista – between Non-human Animal, Seer and Saint

The first obviously disabled person is Savista, “oloaga satului” [“the village lame”]. In this way of imagining, she is the kind of person who, like “the” teacher, “the” priest, etc., belongs to the overall panorama of the (Romanian) village. Right at the beginning, when the village dance is described in order to introduce the readers to the essential plot location and the protagonists, “Savista, the village cripple, crept through the gate, worming her way through the people’s legs”³⁰. The physical description the narrator uses to introduce her highlights her appearance, which is different from that of all the other characters. What Garland-Thomson means becomes apparent when one concludes that disabled literary characters’ “bodily configurations operate as spectacles”³¹: “Her legs were maimed from birth and her long wiry arms served as hooks to drag her crippled body along. The whitish lips of her enormous mouth covered froth-flecked gums and sparse pointed

²⁸ Maren Linett, *Bodies of Modernism. Physical Disability in Transatlantic Modernist Literature*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2016, p. 2, see in greater detail also pp. 145-149.

²⁹ See *Ibidem*.

³⁰ Liviu Rebreanu, *Ion*. Transl. by A. Hillard, London, Peter Owen Limited, 1965, p. 14. For the Romanian version see Liviu Rebreanu, *Opere [Works]*, vol. 4: *Ion*. Edited by Niculae Gheran and Valeria Dumitrescu, București, Eminescu, 1970, p. 18: “se târăște pe poartă, printre picioarele oamenilor, Savista, oloaga satului”. The English version consistently translates “oloaga” (“lame”) with the more general word “cripple” which in Romanian would be “schilod”.

³¹ Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, p. 9. See also p. 10: “From folktales and classical myths to modern and postmodern ‘grotesques’, the disabled boy is almost always a freakish spectacle presented by the mediating narrative voice”.

stubs of yellow teeth”³². While her otherness is emphasized and she is given non-human animalistic features, especially through the description of her mouth and teeth, in the same paragraph she is also integrated biologically as part of the human village community in which kinship relations are set out. Significantly, out of all the people, she is related to Florica, “the prettiest girl of Pripas”³³, which gives her a kind of flip-side, or mirror, function and shows the range of possible appearances of the human species here, in the village of Pripas³⁴. Therefore, Savista is explicitly presented as part of the biological community but is clearly excluded from the social community. The description of the crippled woman pushing her way through the crowd seems almost grotesque to the still unfamiliarised reader. Nevertheless, no one “took any notice of her”³⁵.

Andrei Terian elaborates on a hierarchy of the Pripas villagers in Rebreanu’s *Ion* and makes social position and eventual promotion in the social structure the decisive criteria for an unchallenged – or less challenged – position. Terian distinguishes between “supra-humanity”, “superior humanity”, “simple humanity”, “inferior humanity”, and “infra-humanity”³⁶. Despite having a subordinate position to children, Savista is addressed once as follows: “No really, you’re worse than the silliest of children...³⁷”.

And by her repeatedly emphasized animal-like existence outside in the courtyards or inside the house on corridor floors –

Trifon Tătaru kept her in his house to look after the children³⁸.

Savista the cripple, more dead than alive with fright at the men’s shouts, was sitting crouched near the porch where she had shrunk back to avoid being trodden under their feet³⁹.

... she would stick to the Veranda like a toad⁴⁰.

³² Rebreanu, *Ion*, p. 14. Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 18: “Are picioarele încârcite din naștere, iar brațele lungi și osoase ca niște cângi anume spre a-și târî schilozenia, și o gură enormă cu buzele alburii de sub care se întind gingiile îmbălate, cu colți de dinți galbeni, rari și lungi”.

³³ *Ibidem*. Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 18: “fata cea mai frumoasă din Pripas”.

³⁴ Garland-Thomson points to this fluidity caused by the fact that “anyone can become disabled at any time” which, hence, is also “perhaps more threatening to those who identify themselves as normates” (*Extraordinary Bodies*, p. 14).

³⁵ Rebreanu, *Ion*, p. 14. Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 18: “N-o bagă în seamă nimeni!”.

³⁶ See Andrei Terian: “Oameni, câini și alte dobitoace: O lectură pseudo-darwinistă a romanului *Ion* de Liviu Rebreanu” [“Men, Dogs and Other Beasts: A Pseudo-Darwinian Reading of Liviu Rebreanu’s *Ion*”], *Transilvania*, 2018, 11-12, p. 20.

³⁷ Rebreanu, *Ion*, p. 14. Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 19: “Vai de mine, că ești mai rea ca copiii cei fără minte”.

³⁸ *Ibidem*. Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 18: “Trifon Tătaru o ține pe lângă casă”.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 27. Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 37: “Savista [...] ședea ghemuită, speriată moartă de răcnetele oamenilor, ferindu-se să nu fie călcată în picioare”.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 360. Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 504: “ea se lipea pe prisă ca o broască”.

Careful not to stumble over Savista and wake her up, he groped his way to the corner where he found the tool...⁴¹

– Savista is given a place in the category of “inferior humanity”. This category also includes Jews and Roma who, for very different reasons, have no opportunities for change or advancement. The category of “infra-humanity” includes – amongst others – some non-disabled humans like Ion’s father Alexandru Glanetașu. He is apparently lazy, a peasant who, according to the description, was born to be an artist. Yet, as an unproductive villager, he brings no benefit at all to the community. By contrast, Savista is assigned tasks by the families who provide for her. She fulfils these tasks, such as tending to children or keeping chickens from wandering into the house. Through alms, she manages to acquire a modest amount of money for herself. She is in a constant state of dependency and occasionally homeless. Even her begging has to be authorized⁴².

However, Savista is not only “the village lame” who completes the “picturesque” naturalistic village picture. She also has a role to play. Her observations and conclusions regarding the love relationships in the village have a lasting impact on events: in particular, Ion, who is following Florica, is a thorn in her side. Savista’s interventions also determine Florica’s husband, George, to become aware of this and finally slay Ion. Although Savista is often more able to make herself understood by stuttering and gesticulating when agitated, her key phrases have a seer-like character: several times, the words “George will kill you all” are put into her mouth. In this way, she resembles the mythological Cassandra, who foresees doom. This function within the novel’s plot is not only inherent in her name, “Savista”, which refers to a visionary character⁴³. Her deformed body also supports this reading. Deutsch points to the conceptual link between deformity and monstrosity: the latter “is derived from *monstra*, meaning a warning or a sign of imminent catastrophe. ‘Deformity’, like ‘monstrosity’, is at once sign and story”⁴⁴. But her name also contains the meaning “the day of worship”. Savista worships George; thus, her moral claim of uncovering the affair is mixed with the unconditional will to do George a favour and harm Ion, whom she hates. When Savista is first introduced in the novel, Maria, Trifon Tataru’s wife, impatiently

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, p. 384. Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 539: “Încet, să nu se împiedice de Savista și s-o scoale, pipăi în ungher și o găsi...”.

⁴² See in particular *Ibidem*, pp. 359-360.

⁴³ See <https://www.names.org/n/savista/about>. Accessed July 20, 2024.

⁴⁴ Deutsch, *Deformity*, p. 52. The Latin origin is *monstra*. On the different assessments and treatments of cripples under different historical conditions, see Rudolf Wilhelm Brednich et al. (eds.), *Enzyklopädie des Märchens*, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1996, <https://www.degruyter.com/database/-EMO/entry/emo.8.109/html>. Accessed July 20, 2024. The attitudes could vary from extreme rejection to the highest esteem, ominous or auspicious; in the majority of cases, however, the ominous predominated. In pre-modern times, physical disability was seen in several religions as God’s punishment for sin.

and indignantly bumps into her. She tries to understand what Savista is trying to say and desperately addresses her (in the Romanian original) as “woman of God”⁴⁵. It could be this transcending existence of Savista as laid out by the author – between non-human, animal-like inscriptions (due to her physical impairments) and God, coupled with her strategically relevant function – that does not let her (stay) at the bottom of the village hierarchy.

Otherwise, the account follows quite stereotypical perspectives on a disabled woman “considered undesirable, asexual, and unsuitable as parent”⁴⁶, even though she is only twenty-five. But Tataru’s wife is ashamed when she sees Savista arriving at the celebrations, even though no one else takes notice of her. Not being seen is painful for Savista, not only physically, when people trample over her, but also emotionally. She hates it when people do not listen to her or turn away from her, as in the case of Ana, whom she wants to warn about Ion’s betrayal. She is very emotional. We learn early on that she loves music and social pleasures. The narrator is not as ignorant as most village characters, as he elaborates on her emotions and state of mind for some short moments. Yet, as soon as another main character passes by, the narrator’s voice switches over and leaves behind the often-upset woman. Besides, he labels her emotional behaviour as “wild passion peculiar to cripples”⁴⁷. Very often, she is only called “the cripple”⁴⁸. Although Ion is convicted in the end, she ends up disgruntled.

Savista must be a woman. Here, an intersectional aspect takes effect in its problematic form. Her hysterical side can be closely linked to women’s characterizations of the time. Interestingly, the close links between body and mind – their interplay – or the “bodymind” can be found in modernist literature, infiltrated by the latest psychology trends at the time⁴⁹. If one reads hysteria as anger and resistance, also against the patriarchal system and Ion’s male-connoted violence and sexual assault, the opportunity to criticize patriarchal violence lies within her character⁵⁰. However, at the end of the novel, the narrator preserves the

⁴⁵ The English version just says “What’s that got to do with you?” – Rebreanu, *Ion*, p. 14. Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 19: “Ce-ți pasă ție, femeia lui Dumnezeu?”.

⁴⁶ Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, “Feminist Disability Studies”, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 30, 2005, 2, pp. 1557-1587. See also Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, pp. 25-26.

⁴⁷ Rebreanu, *Ion*, p. 359. Rebreanu, *Opere*, pp. 503-504: “Savista îl iubea cu o furie sălbatică, atât de caracteristică estropiaților”.

⁴⁸ Twenty times she is referred to simply as “the cripple”, without any proper name; three times “the cripple” follows her name as an attribute. A few times this term is used in Ion’s thoughts to indicate his negative attitude towards her, but most of the time she is simply called “the cripple” in the narrator’s running text.

⁴⁹ Linett, *Bodies of Modernism*, p. 5ff.

⁵⁰ Some suggestions regarding women, disability, hysteria and resistance, I owe to Rachel Gorman and Onyinyechukwu Udegbe, “Disabled Woman/Nation: Re-narrating the Erasure of (Neo)colonial Violence in Ondjaki’s *Good Morning Comrades* and Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*”, *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies*, 4, 2010, 3, pp. 321-323.

status quo and does not expand this possibility any further. It is also more than obvious that her social status is miserable; even begging for alms is strictly regulated to one day a week during the time she stays with Florica and George. So here we have another issue: in this case, the *social* aspect joins in. Lastly, her name can be linked to Urdu, the Indo-Aryan language spoken in Pakistan and India⁵¹, although this needs further confirmation. This would link her to the Roma population and associate her with another excluded and disadvantaged group, which I will deal with in the following section.

Holbea and the Other Folk Musicians — Dehumanized Serfs

In the novel *Ion*, there are several characters with physical impairments. The folk musician Holbea, also introduced in the very first village reunion, is described as follows: “Holbea, with one eye and a club foot, had only three strings to his fiddle, but he accompanied his partner with the same intensity as Găvan, [...] strumming the chords of his double-bass”⁵². The description of the physical impairment – one-eyed and with a limping leg, like the devil⁵³ – is mirrored in the material object, the violin, which is missing a string.

But one should also add the more detailed description of Găvan: a short relative clause that contains four extremely strong, negatively connoted attributions (compared to the Romanian version in the footnote, the English version contains only three attributes): “Holbea, with one eye and a club foot, had only three strings to his fiddle, but he accompanied his partner with the same intensity as Găvan, a dark ungainly gypsy, strumming the chords of his double-bass”⁵⁴.

And finally, one can add Briceag. The name of the third musician means “pocket-knife” and most probably refers to a criminal past. Also, Anca Parvulescu and Manuela Boatcă assume that Holbea lost his eye after a violent confrontation

⁵¹ See <https://www.urdupoint.com/names/girls/shaista-name-urdu/95012.html>. Accessed July 20, 2024.

⁵² Rebreanu, *Ion*, p. 11. Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 14: “Holbea e chior și are un picior mai scurt [...], iar la vioară numai trei coarde, dar secondează cu aceeași patimă cu care Găvan, [...] apasă cu arcul pe strunele gordunii”.

⁵³ See again Brednich et al. (eds.), *Enzyklopädie*, lemma “Hinken, Hinkender” [limping, the limping one], <https://www.degruyter.com/database/EMO/entry/emo.6.204/html>. Accessed July 20, 2024. For *choir/one-eyed* see *Ibidem*, <https://www.degruyter.com/database/EMO/entry/emo.3.204/html?lang=de>. Accessed July 20, 2024.

⁵⁴ Rebreanu, *Ion*, p. 11. Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 14: “Holbea e chior și are un picior mai scurt, iar la vioară numai trei coarde, dar secondează cu aceeași patimă cu care Găvan, un țigan urât și negru ca un harap, apasă cu arcul pe strunele gordunii”. To highlight my rejection of pejorative and racially derogatory language, I have struck through certain offensive terms. While the word *țigan* (*gypsy*) appears 33 times in the main text or as a form of address, the disrespectful term *cioară* (crow) is used twice to address the musicians.

and that his name might be a nickname⁵⁵. Thereby, the three *lăutari* (the Romanian word for folk musicians) are given the additional characteristic of outlaws. The description of the fiddlers is dense and detailed in the opening scene, where readers are introduced to the village population. It leaves hardly any room for an unbiased perspective beyond the tightly woven clichés about Roma people, both disabled and negatively racialized⁵⁶.

However, in the eyes of both the narrator and reader, the description of all the “inadequacies” is counterbalanced by the effect of the music itself on the bystanders. The young adults especially are dancing and focusing on each other. Throughout the novel, the quality of the musicians is presented as essential for every celebration in the village. In one case, a reunion is scheduled on condition of the availability of the *lăutari*. But while everyone fusses over them and the prestige of the festivals depends on the quality of the musicians, the supply-demand principle does not affect pricing. Despite performing their work to perfection, they are constantly exposed to the threat of somebody stealing or destroying their instruments⁵⁷, or of being paid inadequately or not at all⁵⁸. This does not prevent the narrator from negatively underlining the solicitation of tips with supposed erotic advances, by which Găvan tries to impress the female listeners. From an intersectional point of view, disability, race and class overlap with thoroughly negative consequences – for their “real” economic situation as well as their social standing in the village hierarchy.

Another short scene represents the “strangeness” of the Roma population from an assumed (Romanian) white and non-disabled perspective. This perspective is embodied by the audience of a small sketch performed on the occasion of a public ball in the nearby community of Armadia. It reinforces the stereotypical view of Roma as disabled and disconnected from the assumed “normal” part of the local population. I quote from *Ion*:

The performance had already begun... A lanky, weedy-looking schoolboy was reciting a ~~gipsy~~ anecdote, grimacing all the time, rushing up and down the stage, changing his

⁵⁵ Anca Parvulescu, Manuela Boatcă, “The *Longue Durée* of Enslavement: Extracting Labor from Romani Music in Liviu Rebreanu’s *Ion*”, *Literature Compass* 17, 2020, 1-2, 2020, p. 11.

⁵⁶ For the history of white supremacist ideology and the consequent way of dehumanizing racial groups labelled non-white by attributing them disability tropes, see Morgan, *Race and Disability*, pp. 674-675.

⁵⁷ Rebreanu, *Ion*, p. 25, 29.

⁵⁸ Parvulescu and Boatcă have dealt extensively with the aspect of labour in Rebreanu’s *Ion*, especially with unpaid or badly paid labour as in the case of the Roma musicians. See Parvulescu, Boatcă, “The *Longue Durée*”.

voice constantly, rousing boisterous guffaws at the back of the hall and discreet smiles among the chairs in front.⁵⁹

Parvulescu and Boatcă describe this scene in their own words as follows: “The student is mimicking stereotypes about exaggerated facial expression and inability to control one’s body or one’s voice”⁶⁰. This is a very eloquent way of describing the social construction of disability, ending in social exclusion. They continue, “The community gathers and collectively mocks a racialized minority”⁶¹. Such a performative act is a way of repeating and codifying existing social prejudices – like telling a joke. By including what was most likely a typical performance at the time in his work – which has become canonical – Rebreanu further contributes to reinforcing this prejudice, according to which the Roma were as good as “handicapped”.

In the case of the local Roma and the local Romanian population, the novel constructs a relationship that can hardly be thought of separately, as we have seen in the biological closeness of Savista and Florica. The above performance “reinforces a sense of community [...], a sense of national community that constitutively excludes Roma”. This exclusion proves “necessary to the production, through a very particular rhetorical gambit” of the audience’s “Romanianness and [...] their implicit whiteness”⁶², as Parvulescu and Boatcă put it. Following this logic, they point out one band that plays “a song that would become the Romanian national anthem, ‘Romanians, awaken’”⁶³ close to the end of the novel. This shows the indispensable part the Roma play: firstly in the community life in general, by decisively shaping the character of the festivities, and secondly as a contrasting template to the white (Romanian) majority, which is reinforced against the backdrop of the non-white (Roma) minority. In this combination, the Roma crucially contribute to the increasing sense of the Romanians as a (healthy) national community. In their work “Diversitate identitară în romanul românesc”, the authors note a significant presence of Romani characters in Romanian fiction. However, they observe that these portrayals are often heavily stereotyped, primarily conveyed through the perspectives of non-Romani characters⁶⁴. This phenomenon has similarities with the widespread portrayal of disabled people “penned” by non-disabled people in world literature and also reflects both regionally specific and socio-economic tensions.

⁵⁹ Rebreanu, *Ion*, p. 117. Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 167: “Spectacolul începuse... Acuma un elev lung și slab declamă o anecdotă țigănească, strâmbându-se într-una, repezindu-se încoace și încolo pe scenă, schimbând mereu glasul și stărnind râsete zgomotoasă în fund și zâmbete discrete pe scaune”.

⁶⁰ Parvulescu; Boatcă, “The *Longue Durée*”, p. 16.

⁶¹ *Ibidem*.

⁶² *Ibidem*, p. 13.

⁶³ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁴ Pogoja et al., “Diversitate identitară”, p. 37.

In contrast to the peasants, the *lăutari* move geographically all the time but are excluded from upward mobility in the village's social hierarchy⁶⁵. Much worse, they are treated as if the festivity organizers own them – as if enslavement has not ended yet. When tired and longing for a pause, the audience harshly demands “with threatening scowls or entreating glances: Go on, ~~gypsy!~~ ~~blackbird!~~”⁶⁶. The modernist narrator who enters regularly into the thoughts and psyche of the novel's protagonists does not do so in the case of these musicians; their stress can be inferred from descriptions of them being tired or sweaty, but their inner life is kept hidden from the reader. In one case, the folk musicians switch to the Romani language, another alienating effect, which seems to give even the narrator the excuse of being unable to find out about their personal exchange even if he had wanted to.

Ion – the Super-body

Regarding the description of his body, the novel's main character, Ion, is no “neutral, disembodied, universalized norm”, as Garland-Thomson puts it when describing the kind of bodies the inferior or deviant ones usually differ from⁶⁷. To illustrate this, I refer again to Terian's compelling article on the bestiary in *Ion*⁶⁸. He points to the animal comparisons to describe Rebreanu's protagonists and finds relatively consistent descriptions: while passive characters like Ana (who becomes Ion's wife and commits suicide after giving birth to their son) are constantly compared to dogs, Ion's opponent, George (later Florica's husband), is compared to a bull (Romanian: *taur*). However, his description is still inferior to the characterization of Ion as a dragon (Romanian: *balaur*)⁶⁹, or as one mighty enough to slay dragons. For instance, “He felt in him the pride and might of the giant in fairy-tales, who after a grim, deadly battle has slain a host of fearful dragons.”⁷⁰ So, his appearance, which is also how he perceives himself, is gigantic and

⁶⁵ See also Daiana Gărdan, *Între lumi. Romanul românesc în sistemul literar modern [Between Worlds. The Romanian Novel in the Modern Literary System]*, Cluj-Napoca, Casa Cărții de Știință, 2023.

⁶⁶ Rebreanu, *Ion*, p. 11. Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 15: “urlând desperați, cu priviri amenințătoare sau rugătoare: — Zi, țigane! Mai zi, eioară!...”.

⁶⁷ Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, p. 135.

⁶⁸ Terian, “Oameni, câini și alte dobitoace”.

⁶⁹ Here it is not easy to work with the English translation, as Ion is “breathing heavily” which in the Romanian original reads as “aprinș ca un balaur” (fiery as a dragon). Rebreanu, *Ion*, p. 32. See the whole sentence in Romanian – Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 45: “Să știi că zece ani nu scap din temniță și tot nu mă las până nu-i văd sângele! Murmură Ion, aprinș ca un balaur, încleștând pumnii și cutremurându-se...”.

⁷⁰ Rebreanu, *Ion*, p. 306. Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 430: “Se vedea acum mare și puternic ca un uriaș mare din basme care a biruit, în luptele grele, o ceață de balauri îngrozitori”.

colossal, and he has many “features” that enable him to survive all kinds of opponents.

However, the most eloquent scene in this sense is the description of his corpse. After his death, the coroner over-idealizes him and refers to his body's physical strength and abilities:

As he cut and scissored away, the loquacious doctor pointed out the wounds and explained the situation to the judge, who kept smoking one cigarette after another, to drive away his nausea:

“This one, Mr Justice, was the toughest blow of all... He bashed in the crown of the head, but the skull-bone was so strong that it only cracked... Quite a miracle! Very rare case indeed! Or perhaps the blow was not such a heavy one after all. Anyhow it is extraordinary to have one's head struck with a hoe and the skull not break. That can only happen to peasants... On the other hand, here are four ribs completely broken. A fatal blow too, naturally... Here you can see how he split his chest open, why there's a wound big enough to get your fingers in... And long too... Ten... thirteen centimetres... The hoe, of course!... Yes, the arm is shattered too, not too serious... This would have been a light thing... it would have healed soon... at the worst the arm would have remained somewhat stiff... It must have been the last blow, when the murderer had cooled off a little.”

Then, when he had done and washed his hands, he declared emphatically:

“The man was as strong as steel!... He could have lived a hundred years!”⁷¹

“That can only happen to peasants” is a fascinating reflection on the predominant intellectual discourse on the Romanian peasantry of the time, the peasant standing at the core of Romanianness. Through the eyes of the teacher's son Titu – who finds employment with a municipal clerk and is given the task of collecting taxes from farmers still in arrears – the reader also meets the impoverished and little educated peasants that were much too weak to get involved in political action. But with Ion, Rebreanu has invented a strong *and very potent* peasant body which, he indicates, will survive under any circumstances.

Interwoven at the novel's very end, relatively concealed by the fact that it “might” be just a rumor, is another telling example. Florica turns out to be pregnant shortly after the events, most likely with Ion's child:

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 389-390. Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 546: “Tăind și forfecând, doctorul guraliv arăta rănile și explica judecătorului care fuma țigară după țigară, spre a-și alunga greața: ‘– Uite asta, domnule judecător, asta a fost cea mai grea... L-a pocnit în creștetul capului, dar osul a fost destul de rezistent că doar a plesnit... Mare minune! Rar caz! Sau poate lovitura n-a fost prea de tot puternică. Orișicum e o minune să dai cuiva în cap cu sapa și țeasta să nu se spargă. Așa ceva numai printre țărani se găsește... În schimb patru coaste rupte complet... Lovitură mortală și asta, firește... Poftim cum i-a deschis coșul, mai-mai să-ți încapă degetele în rană... Și ce lungă... Zece... treisprezece centimetri... Ehe! sapa!... Da, e zdrobit și brațul, dar nu prea rău... Asta n-ar fi avut importanță... se vindeca... cel mult brațul rămânea cu beteșug... Desigur însă că a fost ultima lovitură, când ucigașul a mai pierdut din furie...’ Apoi, isprăvind și spălându-se pe mâini, declară hotărât: ‘– A fost un om ca țelul!... Putea să trăiască o sută de ani!’”.

“By the time George comes back, I think his wife will be waiting for him with a baby in her arms. She says she’s with child... Maybe, that’s woman’s mission”, added Toma a little later, a brighter look in his eyes.

A rumor was circulating in the village that Florica had been left with child by Ion. No one could tell where this report had come from, but there were quite a number of people who believed it. Some old wives, greedy for gossip, kept questioning Savista. The latter had moved back to Trifon Tătaru’s and resumed begging in Broad Lane, as the mere sight of her was an eyesore to Florica. The cripple, however, would not answer any questions, but was all the time so sour-tempered and gloomy that the people started saying that she must have entered her death year.⁷²

At the very end of the novel, the narrator’s camera zooms out from the scenery without noticing any serious change: “The village is left behind, the same as ever, as though nothing had ever changed. Some people have passed away, others have taken their place”⁷³. The underlying message is that the driving force remains with Ion, who, despite appearing as the victim of violence and dying at the end of the novel, still represents a continuing energy. This energy foreshadows future events where peasants like him will rebel, as in the violent Romanian Peasants’ Revolt of 1907. In this context, the figure of the disabled Romanian woman Savista can be seen as a symbol of the “disabled” inter-imperial province of Transylvania⁷⁴. Even though not yet old, she is described as becoming weaker and weaker and possibly even dying soon. Ion, as an idealized prototype of the Romanian peasant, has an attachment to the soil – see the omnipresent claim of the Romanian peasants: “Vrem pământ” (“We want land”). This means that the Romanian peasant would never follow the example of the teacher’s son, Titu, and move to Romania, i.e., the Old Kingdom, consisting of Moldova and Walachia. Instead, Romania has come to him – and thus, implicitly, Transylvania must become a part of Romania. In this respect, it is surely no coincidence that one of the last musical pieces mentioned in the novel is the future national anthem *Awaken thee, Romanian!*.

⁷² *Ibidem*, pp. 406-407. Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 570: “– Mi se pare că până să vie acasă George, nevastă-sa o să-l aștepte cu copilașul în brațe. Zice că-i grea... O fi, că asta-i menirea femeii”, rosti mai târziu Toma, înseninat puțin. Prin sat însă umbra zvonului că Florica ar fi rămas însărcinată cu Ion. Nimeni nu știa de unde a ieșit vorba aceasta, dar mulți o credeau. Unele babe mai lacome de bârfeli ispiteau pe Savista, care acum se mutase înapoi la Trifon Tătaru și cerșea iar în Ulița Mare, deoarece Florica o vedea ca sarea în ochi. Oloaga însă nu răspundea nimănui, era veșnic acră și mânioasă, încât lumea spunea că trebuie să fi intrat în anul morții”.

⁷³ *Ibidem*, p. 409. Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 574: “Satul a rămas înapoi același, parcă nimic nu s-ar fi schimbat. Câțiva oameni s-au stins, alții le-au luat locul”.

⁷⁴ Gorman and Udegbe have written a fascinating analysis of two African novels where the disabled women protagonists’ bodies can be seen as tropes in postcolonial African literature and symbols of the disabled postcolonial nation. Gorman and Udegbe, *Disabled Woman/Nation*, pp. 309-326, see in particular p. 311, 318.

Conclusion

This approach, centered on disability, can be expanded. Not only are Savista and the Romani musicians barred from social advancement, but as a farmer, Ion also has very limited opportunities for advancement and finds himself in various dependencies when it comes to his interests, such as a promising marriage, the advice of the teacher, and the (non-existent) favour of the judge. Although he is the strongest character in the novel, literally and figuratively, and symbolically represents the potential of the still incomplete (but desired) modern nation, he is only indirectly at the centre. In literature, he is one of the earliest peasant characters to act as a main protagonist⁷⁵. However, he is seen through the eyes of a narrator aligned more closely with the perspective of the teacher's son Titu⁷⁶. It is also worth noting that Titu's family enjoy a higher proportion of direct speech and interventions than the peasant class⁷⁷.

Nevertheless, my contribution focuses primarily on the physical and bodily conditions and particularities of characters not previously analysed from this perspective. In the novel *Ion*, disability and bodily conditions are gradually conceived as links between extremes – from the most physically impaired to the most potent body, Ion's. Savista, born disabled, is related to Florica, whose beauty and attractiveness are highlighted several times throughout the book. Ion's ideal body stands in contrast to the impaired bodies of the Roma musicians. Savista and Ion hate each other, as do Ion and the *lăutari*, although they simultaneously depend upon each other. Following the symbolic thread of Romanian nationhood, which can be seen as symbolically negotiated, no condition is perfect – so far – although the plot contains a vision: Despite Ion dying as a consequence of pursuing his sexual and corporeal desire for his rival's wife, Florica – an action that might initially be perceived as a weakness – this decision ironically ensures his biological legacy through the posthumous birth of an illegitimate child. Therefore, he not only survives biologically, but the child also results from the union of the novel's healthiest, most attractive and able-bodied characters. So, in this case, disability is not primarily necessary “to expose imperfection and inhumanity”⁷⁸,

⁷⁵ Pogoja's (et al.) result of the quantitative meta study is that “Protagonists of the peasant class are nearly non-existent either in first- or third-person narratives, until the beginning of the 1930s” – see Pogoja et al., “Diversitatea în romanul românesc”, p. 39.

⁷⁶ The fact that Titu is the narrator's alter ego is repeatedly emphasized in the secondary literature, see e.g., Alexandru Piru, *Liviu Rebreanu: Leben und Werk*. Transl. to German by Eva Marschang, Bukarest, Jugendverlag, 1968.

⁷⁷ Vlad Pogoja, Laurentiu-Marian Neagu, Mihai Dascalu, “The Character Network in Liviu Rebreanu's *Ion*: A Quantitative Analysis of Dialogue”, *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory* 6, 2020, 2, p. 32.

⁷⁸ Laura L. Behling, “The Necessity of Disability in Flannery O'Conner's *Good Country People* and *The Lame Shall Enter First*”, *Flannery O'Connor Review*, 2006, 4, p. 88.

but to strengthen the ideal image of able-bodiedness, and in this case for the sake of the healthy Romanian nation (yet) to come.

When looking in detail at Ion's feelings – as described by the narrator – towards his opponents and all the impaired bodies and psychologically weak characters around him (one could add Ana to the previously presented figures), his perception contains a lot of inhumanity. Ion is brutal, not only in his behaviour but also in his thoughts, when “he had for some time been feeling Savista's enmity and he often felt like strangling her to clear his way to Florica. But George was the only one he hated, more and more bitterly, for it was on account of him that the woman was not free”⁷⁹.

He also behaves inhumanly towards the *lăutari*. He is coarse, rhetorically violent and prone to physical violence. But still the narrator does not speak out, remaining a simple observer and creating no empathy for Savista or the *lăutari*. For the most part, Ana's tragic story also remains purely descriptive. So, in this respect, it is possible to see *Ion* as an example of “literature's complicity in the historical devaluation of people with disabilities”⁸⁰.

Furthermore, given the focus on the characters' bodies, *Ion* can also be read as a narrative about a particular society and its aspirations at a certain point in time. I hope to have shown convincingly that disability studies “explore the embeddedness of bodies within cultures”⁸¹ and that (fictional) individual bodies invite interpretation as reflections of the social imperfections of the time they inhabit and “embody”. Linett argues even further about disability in our minds by concentrating on the embeddedness of canonical literature and its narratives. She considers that they have an influence, explicitly or implicitly, on many contemporary bioethical discussions, especially about the value of disabled and nonhuman lives⁸². Here, she touches upon an aspect that has motivated me to study the aspect of disability in this canonical literary text. To uphold the relevance and efficacy of literature in shaping our culture, we must consciously and critically examine stereotypical representations to develop an informed perspective and prevent their perpetuation.

⁷⁹ Rebreanu, *Ion*, p. 371. Rebreanu, *Opere*, p. 520: “Ion însuși simțise de mult vrăjmășia Savistei și deseori îi venea s-o sugrume, ca să-și deschidă drumul la Florica. Ura însă numai pe George, din ce în ce mai rău, fiindcă numai din pricina lui nu e slobodă femeia”.

⁸⁰ Mitchell, Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, p. 17.

⁸¹ Linett, *Bodies of Modernism*, p. 1.

⁸² Maren Tova, *Literary Bioethics. Animality, Disability, and the Human*, New York, New York University Press, 2020.

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EXTRAORDINARY BODIES IN LIVIU REBREANU’S *ION*. A READING
THROUGH THE LENS OF DISABILITY STUDIES
(Abstract)

This article aims to develop a Disability Studies inspired reading of the Romanian canonical novel *Ion* by Liviu Rebreanu. Consequently, the paper focuses on the marginal figures endowed with physical impairments. On the one hand, the novel impressively depicts the ethnic and gender hierarchy in the village society of the time. The hierarchy is closely linked with degrees of disability: the physically impaired and mentally weak have at least one further characteristic of “disadvantage”. This could be a “race” or gender considered inferior and directly associated with a social disadvantage. On the other hand, the analysis reveals how the protagonist’s particularly potent body functions as a foil for contrast and comparison. Even though *Ion* is the protagonist, he dies in the end. Does the able-bodied then also have no future? A visionary answer lies in the symbolic link between the characters’ bodily condition and the Romanian state of nationhood. At the time when the novel is set, the very beginning of the 20th century, the modern Romanian nation, including all Romanians, had not yet been fulfilled. But *Ion* leaves behind an illegitimate child to be birthed by the apparently most able-bodied woman of the village Pripas. Therefore, he leaves a legacy – and with it, the chance of a prosperous future. This shows how the eugenic debates of the time were also internalized by Rebreanu, as biological strength and the will to survive are positively united and linked to the idea of the (Romanian) nation, while all others are given no chance.

Keywords: Liviu Rebreanu, *Ion*, disability, intersectionality, nation.

CORPURI EXTRAORDINARE ÎN *ION* DE LIVIU REBREANU. O LECTURĂ DIN PERSPECTIVA STUDIILOR DIZABILITĂȚII

(Rezumat)

Articolul propune o reinterpretare a romanului canonic *Ion* de Liviu Rebreanu din perspectiva studiilor umaniste ale dizabilității. În consecință, cercetarea se focalizează pe figurile marginale ale romanului, a căror funcționalitate este afectată din cauza unor deficiențe fizice. Pe de o parte, ierarhia socială, etnică și, de asemenea, de gen a societății rurale din acea vreme este descrisă impresionant – și strâns legată de gradele de handicap: persoanele cu deficiențe fizice și mintale au cel puțin o altă caracteristică „debilitantă”, fie că este vorba de o „rasă” sau de un gen care este considerat inferior. Pe de altă parte, articolul dezvăluie cât de important este corpul deosebit de puternic al protagonistului Ion ca element de contrast și de comparație. Chiar dacă este eroul romanului, el moare în cele din urmă. Așadar, nu are viitor nici cel „capabil”? Un răspuns este oferit de legătura simbolică a condiției corporale a personajelor cu starea națiunii române. În momentul în care se petrece acțiunea romanului, chiar la începutul secolului al XX-lea, națiunea română modernă, care îi include pe toți românii, nu era încă împlinită. Dar, lăsând în urmă un copil nelegitim care să fie născut de femeia aparent cea mai atrăgătoare din satul Pripas, Ion lasă o moștenire – și, odată cu ea, șansa unui viitor prosper. Această situație arată cum dezbaterile eugenice ale vremii au fost interiorizate și de Rebreanu, forța biologică și voința de supraviețuire fiind unificate și corelate cu ideea de națiune (română), în timp ce tuturor celorlalți nu li se dă nicio șansă.

Cuvinte-cheie: Liviu Rebreanu, *Ion*, dizabilitate, intersecționalitate, națiune.