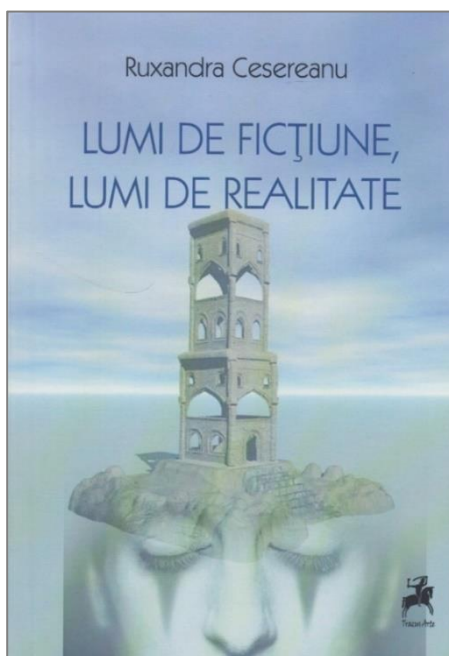


BOOKS

Ruxandra Cesereanu, *Lumi de ficțiune, lumi de realitate*, București: Editura Tracus Arte, 2022, 354p.

Ruxandra Cesereanu's 2022 book, *Lumi de ficțiune, Lumi de realitate* (*Worlds of Fiction, Worlds of Reality*), is a comprehensive and insightful exploration into various dimensions of literary fiction and its interplay with reality. Spanning across diverse literary traditions, genres, and historical contexts, Cesereanu delves into the works of notable authors like T.S. Eliot, C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien,

António Lobo Antunes, Roberto Bolaño, Will Self, Marie Darrieussecq, Leonid Dimov, Mircea Cărtărescu, Andrei Codrescu, Sei Shonagon, Franz Werfel, Ion D. Sîrbu, Patrick Modiano, Herta Müller, Elfriede Jelinek, and Ludmila Ulitskaya, providing readers with a rich and nuanced understanding of the complexities and intricacies of



their narratives, along with a personal comparative style that reinvigorates these long-standing texts.

In her opening chapter, Cesereanu adeptly sets the stage for her book by analyzing T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*. She skillfully contrasts the themes of fertility and sterility in these works, underscoring how they mirror the crises of the early 20th century. Cesereanu in-

terprets Lewis's narrative as a revival of antiquity, a journey back to ancient virtues through a children's crusade, offering a response to the modern world's dilemmas. In contrast, Eliot's poem is presented as a quintessential modernist piece, transcending the rational and ideological boundaries set by Frazer's *The*



Golden Bough and Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*, both of which influenced Eliot. Cesereanu illuminates the distinct approaches of Eliot and Lewis in confronting the era's challenges. While Eliot depicts a world devoid of fertility and spirituality, Lewis proposes a vision of redemption, where ancient virtues are rekindled in a new, mythologically enriched world.

The following chapter delves into the works of Tolkien, Lewis, and Rowling, focusing on what Cesereanu terms the "fantasy complex" in literature. This concept is defined as an amalgam of images and ideas centered around one or several archetypes, each marked by a distinct emotional resonance. She discusses how these archetypal clusters not only influence reader behaviors and inspire imitation but also encapsulate the evolution of human consciousness. Cesereanu argues that fantasy literature provides therapeutic and cathartic experiences for readers. It acts as a bridge to the collective unconscious, presenting an alternate, compensatory reality that aids in understanding and processing the complexities of the human experience.

Cesereanu's examination of António Lobo Antunes's literature unveils the intricate tapestry of Portuguese history and psyche. Her analysis focuses on how Antunes's narrative styles vividly portray themes such as colonialism, dictatorship, national identity, and the human condition, effectively capturing the essence of Portugal's tumultuous history and its impact on the national consciousness. In the subsequent chapter, Cesereanu offers an in-depth analysis of Roberto Bolaño's *2666*. She explores its profound engagement with themes of marginalization and femicide, linking these to broader

societal, political, and historical forms of violence. A notable aspect of her analysis is the comparison she draws between the Holocaust and the femicides in the fictional city of Santa Teresa. This parallel serves to underscore a continued thread of violence and the normalization of evil in society. Through this lens, Cesereanu positions *2666* not merely as a literary masterpiece but as a significant socio-political commentary, delving into the cyclical nature of violence and marginalization and its profound implications on the human condition.

In a particularly fascinating chapter, Cesereanu delves into the postmodern novels of Will Self and Marie Darrieussecq, both of which center around the theme of metamorphosis. She expertly navigates through the different types of alterity as defined by philosopher Jean-Jacques Wunenburger: ontological alterity, which is exemplified in Will Self's novel, and the alterity of the contrary, or radical alterity, as seen in Marie Darrieussecq's work. Cesereanu's analysis illuminates how these novels grapple with the concept of physical metamorphosis and its profound effects on both individual and collective identities. She concludes that Self and Darrieussecq utilize these transformations to probe into ontic and cognitive changes, framing their narratives within the context of physical metamorphosis. Cesereanu further argues that these works are contemporary reconfigurations of ancient epic motifs. Through their exploration of non-human and anti-human elements, Self and Darrieussecq offer innovative perspectives on the complexities of contemporary society, revealing new dimensions in the understanding of human and beyond-human experiences.

Cesereanu then shifts her focus to the Romanian poet Leonid Dimov, who, she asserts, did not receive the recognition he deserved during Romania's communist era. Through Braga's analysis, Cesereanu positions Dimov's poetry in the unique intersection of oneirism and Barbianism. She highlights Dimov's distinctive method of merging dreamlike elements with sharp rationality, creating a poetic style that combines the intense, surreal qualities of dreams with the clarity and logic of reason, resulting in a hybrid literary structure. Following this, Cesereanu delves into the prose of Mircea Cărtărescu, emphasizing his unconventional approach to storytelling. She compares Cărtărescu's narrative style to that of a termite architecturally constructing its mound, as opposed to a traditional architect. This analogy underscores the organic, instinctive, and complex nature of Cărtărescu's narrative approach. Further, Cesereanu explores the urban geography present in Cărtărescu's novels, particularly the portrayal of Bucharest. She describes the city as a sensory, simultaneously rational and irrational metropolis. In Cesereanu's view, the urban landscape of Bucharest is intricately intertwined with the mental landscapes of the characters, weaving together a rich tapestry that fuses the internal and external worlds. This complex interplay highlights the depth and intricacy of Cărtărescu's literary depiction of both place and psyche.

The first part of the book concludes with an examination of Andrei Codrescu's multifaceted and nomadic literary contributions. Cesereanu delves into Codrescu's work, which uniquely merges Balkan and American cultural elements. She explores his wide range of poetic influences, including Blaga, Tzara, Berrigan, and Ginsberg,

and discusses his accomplishments as a novelist and essayist. Cesereanu identifies Codrescu's literary journey as being characterized by his inclination towards life as a poetic ferment. This approach manifests in his baroque-postmodern, carnivalesque style, which is both vibrant and eclectic. She notes Codrescu's significant contribution to the contemporary American literary landscape, enriched by his Balkan heritage. Furthermore, Cesereanu highlights Codrescu's enduring commitment to freedom in thought and expression. This is evident in his writing, which displays a strong aversion to cultural coercion and censorship. Cesereanu portrays Codrescu as a literary figure who embodies the spirit of creative liberty, blending diverse cultural influences to create a unique and influential voice in modern literature.

In the second part of her book, titled *Worlds of Reality*, Cesereanu begins with an insightful exploration of Sei Shonagon's *The Pillow Book*. She delves into the exquisite nuances of Japanese aesthetics and nature as portrayed in Shonagon's work, which is deeply entrenched in the sophisticated aesthetic sensibilities developed at the imperial court. Cesereanu interprets Shonagon's vision as consistently leading to a coherent, serene, and ecstatic paradise, starkly contrasting with concepts of non-paradise or anti-paradise. She also examines the social hierarchy inherent in Shonagon's perspective, where supreme aesthetic taste is ascribed to the aristocratic realm. Cesereanu weaves these observations into broader religious and philosophical contexts, concluding the chapter with an intriguing comparison to Akira Kurosawa's 1990 film *Dreams*. Following this, Cesereanu embarks on a detailed discussion of Franz Werfel's *The*

Forty Days of Musa Dagh. She provides an in-depth analysis of its epic narrative structure, historical context, and cultural resonance. Particularly noteworthy is her focus on cataloguing the extensive research surrounding the socio-economic, political, religious, and human rights dimensions of the novel. Additionally, Cesereanu explores themes of national identity and collective memory, adding her own perspective to the substantial body of existing scholarly work on Werfel's influential novel.

Cesereanu then turns her attention to Ion D. Sîrbu's novel *Adio Europa! (Goodbye Europe!)*, which was published posthumously and serves as a satirical and allegorical denunciation of Romania's communist era. Sîrbu, an intellectual and former political prisoner, constructs a dystopian narrative set in the Balkan city of Isarlık, a symbolic representation of a degenerate and infernal society under totalitarian control. In her analysis, Cesereanu positions *Adio Europa!* within the broader context of dystopian literature. She draws compelling parallels between Sîrbu's work and other seminal dystopian narratives, such as Orwell's *Animal Farm*, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, Voltaire's *Candide*, and Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*. Cesereanu portrays *Adio Europa!* as a multifaceted critique of communist Romania, delving into themes of repression, intellectual suppression, moral decay, and the human quest for freedom. The author underscores the novel's significance in shedding light on the dynamics of power and the experiences of suffering under oppressive regimes. She emphasizes its enduring relevance and its valuable contribution to the literary tradition of critiquing totalitarianism, highlighting its importance in understanding

and interpreting the historical and political nuances of such regimes.

In *Worlds of Fiction, Worlds of Reality*, Cesereanu's analysis of Patrick Modiano's *Dora Bruder* and Herta Müller's prose is notably poignant, focusing on their distinct approaches to depicting historical traumas. Modiano's work is characterized by the reconstruction of fragmented identities set against the Holocaust, while Müller portrays the surreal impact of a repressive regime on the human psyche. Cesereanu then examines Elfriede Jelinek's *The Piano Teacher* in the subsequent chapter. This 1983 novel, known for its controversial themes of sadomasochism and eroticism, features the character of Erika Kohut, a piano teacher who symbolizes resistance against patriarchal oppression. Jelinek's narrative, which is anti-pornographic, challenges conventional notions of desire and the objectification of women. Cesereanu interprets Jelinek's work as a deconstructive critique of societal myths surrounding gender relations, emphasizing the novel's exploration of psychological cannibalism and gender dynamics. She argues that Jelinek's narrative illustrates the profound impact of patriarchal structures on individual identity and interpersonal relationships.

In the concluding part of her analysis, Cesereanu explores Ludmila Ulitskaya's novels *Imago* and *Scara lui Iakov*, positioning Ulitskaya as a literary heir to Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Cesereanu lauds Ulitskaya for her adept portrayal of Soviet and post-Soviet Russian life, highlighting her commitment to historical accuracy, psychological depth, and the exploration of totalitarianism's impact on individuals and families. Cesereanu appreciates Ulitskaya's narrative style and thematic focus, noting how these elements contribute

to her standing as a significant contemporary voice in Russian literature. She emphasizes that Ulitskaya, much like Solzhenitsyn, offers a profound and nuanced understanding of the Russian experience under totalitarian rule, and her works continue to reflect and expand upon Solzhenitsyn's legacy. Cesereanu's insights into Ulitskaya's novels underscore the importance of literary continuity in portraying and comprehending the complexities of historical and political realities.

Throughout *Lumi de fictiune*, *Lumi de realitate*, Cesereanu showcases her exceptional skill in dissecting and interpreting complex literary works. Her analysis provides readers with a more profound understanding of the themes, styles, and historical contexts of the featured authors. Her analytical acumen and insightful commentary render this book an invaluable asset for students and scholars of literature, as well as for general readers with a deep interest in comparative literary analysis.

Cesereanu's expertise in comparative literature is evident throughout the book, as she adeptly bridges the realms of fiction and reality. Her comprehensive and insightful analysis not only illuminates the intricacies of each work but also enriches the reader's appreciation of the broader literary landscape. *Lumi de fictiune*, *Lumi de realitate* stands as a testament to Cesereanu's mastery in the field of literature, demonstrating her ability to guide readers through the complex layers of narrative and meaning in a diverse array of literary works.

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