



# Clay and Star

## By Liliana Ursu

A Study Guide

### Synopsis

*Clay and Star* features selections from Romanian writer Liliana Ursu's body of work. Translator Mihaela Moscaliuc captures Ursu's voice singing with the poetics of spirituality. Ursu approaches the world with a divinely tuned ear, determined to rescue whatever beauty lies within, and with an eye keen on capturing with shimmering precision those spiritual and philosophical "nodes" where the sacred and the mundane converge.

### Author Bio

Born in Sibiu, Romania, Liliana Ursu has published thirteen books of poetry in Romanian, five of which have been translated for English-speaking audiences. Ursu is a two-time Fulbright grant recipient and has been awarded Romania's rank of Knight of Arts and Literature.

Translator Mihaela Moscaliuc is also a Fulbright scholar who teaches English Literature at Monmouth University and Poetry and Translation at Drew University.

### Study Questions and Writing Prompts

#### Comprehension

1. Poems in *Clay and Star* are not ordered chronologically. How would you describe the organization of the book?
2. What everyday objects does Ursu elevate to divinity in her poetry?
3. Ursu attempts to activate all the senses in her poems. Choose a poem and identify words used to engage senses other than sight.
4. Besides cities and monasteries in Romania, where else are the poems written?

#### Comprehension (cont'd)

5. Some poems, like "The Room on the Island," are purely descriptive, featuring no verbs. What other poems rely primarily on descriptions and to what effect?

**Writing Prompt:** Write a short poem in Ursu's economic style to describe your classroom or a room at home.

#### Digging Deeper

1. Ursu's poetry requires the audience to have some knowledge of Christianity in order to understand her imagery. What other subjects should a reader be informed about to fully appreciate *Clay and Star*?
2. How does the use of first person (I, we) affect your appreciation of Ursu's poetry?
3. Moscaliuc translated Ursu's poetry from Romanian. What issues can present themselves when translating poetry as opposed to translating prose?
4. Poetry is identified visually by line breaks, and aurally by rhyme and rhythm. How do Ursu and Moscaliuc use both visual and aural devices to shape the poetry?

**Writing Prompt:** Ursu uses concrete everyday objects, such as gardening shears, bees, and flowers, to uncover deeper meaning. Write about an everyday object in your life to reveal the depth of its importance.

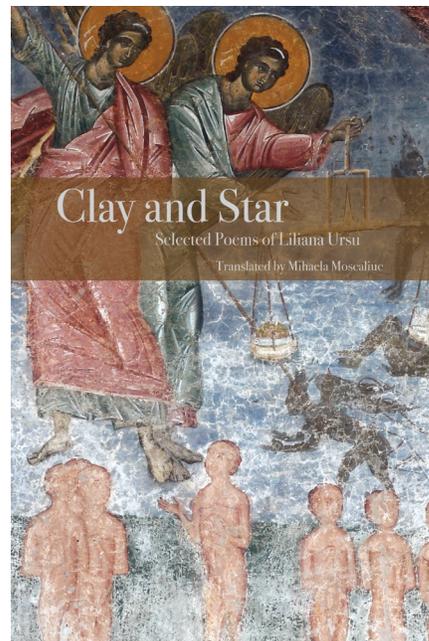
#### Overall Impressions

1. What is the value of looking for something divine or spiritual in the simple everyday things?
2. What did you know about Romania prior to reading *Clay and Star*? How has the book changed your understanding of Romanian culture?

## Overall Impressions (cont'd)

3. How did *Clay and Star* enhance your perspective on Christianity and religious beliefs?

**Writing Prompt:** Write a short poem in Ursu's style to reveal the divine or spiritual aspect of an everyday object.



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