

BOOKS

Maja Lunde, *Istoria albinelor (Bienes historie)*, traducere de Sanda Tomescu Baciu, București, Editura Humanitas Fiction, 2019, 384 p.

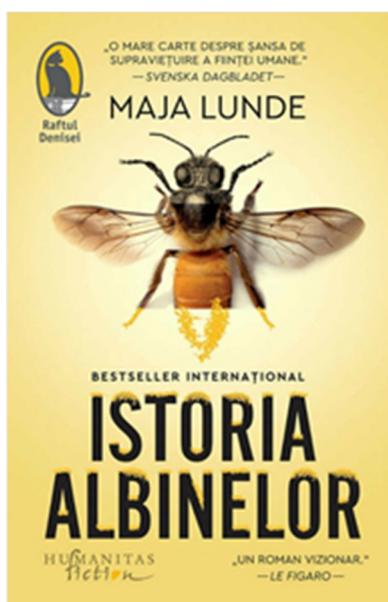
The dystopian novel, *Istoria albinelor* written by Norwegian author Maja Lunde, presents a fiction with a terrifying potential to become reality in the near future. Initially written as a standalone book, *Istoria albinelor* becomes the first pillar in the tetralogy called *The Climate Quartet*. The second one, *Blå* (2017) and the third, *Przewalski's hest* (2019) are both new-born international bestsellers. The fourth is yet a mystery. What the novels have in common is the multivalent perspective when it comes to main characters, periods and places.

Istoria albinelor appeared in Romanian in year 2019, with the support of Norwegian Literature Abroad (NORLA) in the *Raftul Denisei Collection* of the Humanitas Fiction Publishing House, translated by Sanda Tomescu Baciu professor and founder of the Norwegian language and literature bachelor programme at the Faculty of Letters, Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca. She has translated a number of Norwegian authors into Romanian such as Henrik Ibsen, Lars Saabye Christensen and Knut Hamsun. Regarding this translation,

it gives the Romanian public the opportunity to encounter with a novel of high magnitude internationally, as being sold in millions of copies and published in over 35 countries. The translation of *Bienes historie (Istoria albinelor)* was published with the support of NORLA (Norwegian Literature Abroad).

Maja Lunde manages by imagination to create an absolutely plausible scenario considering the current climate changes, the most important one being global warming. The novel has a certain degree of tension and suspense that attracts the reader in its lecture.

The action is divided into three temporal and spatial perspectives. Three families, from different continents and times, encounter the drama of the disappearance of the bees. The story starts with Tao, a young hard-working mother, who is suffering a family crisis. Space and time are well defined, namely District 242, Shirong, Sichuan in 2098. Also, in the beginning we find out that the bees disappeared in 1980, being killed by pesticides used in agriculture. The history continues with William, in Maryville, Hertfordshire,



England, 1852. A naturalist with high aspirations, he falls ill by recognizing his nothingness. In an impulse to overcome his condition and to rise in the eyes of the family, he gets involved in building an innovative hive, which later proves to be an additional disappointment. The third storyline presents George from Autumn Hill, Ohio, USA. Convinced traditionalist, he strongly opposes the methods of industrialization used by competition. He wants to leave a legacy, the beekeeping business that has been in the family for generations. However, he cannot avoid the phenomenon of bees disappearing, but he hopes that if he manages to arouse his son's interest, the business will be reborn.

The three narrative voices, distinct at first sight, alternate and evolve each with its story, to the point where they become convergent. Finally, the stories of the characters merge into one, as the life of each character is directly or indirectly related to the existence of bees.

The book, although it presents a fictional world, has a documentary basis, the CCD syndrome - Colony Collapse Disorder, being as real and topical as possible. George's words draw attention to the causes behind the disappearance of bee colonies: *[I always have kept bees away from poisons because they became apathetic, which inevitably led to losses. But in recent years, many beekeepers have adopted new methods. I would have liked farmers to continue to use the methods of yesteryear, when crops survived on their own without the help of insecticides. But it seems that it was no longer possible. The pests could destroy an entire crop in one night. We were already far too numerous, and the price of food, low, while the cost of living was too high for anyone to dare to take any risk]* (p.173). Unfortunately, the

phenomenon of over industrialization can make the inevitable predicted by Maja Lunde a reality in the near future. The novel also serves as a warning for the existence of all mankind.

The family universe is the secondary theme of the novel. The relationship between parents and children is addressed in each of the three stories. William embodies a misogynistic character, who gives credit to his only son, rather than to his daughters. Later, he realizes that Charlotte was the one who managed to get him out of the terrible melancholy that kept him bedridden and to restore his former passion. George sees the only hope of the family business in his son Tom who shows very little interest in his father's aspirations, as he wants to become a writer. The problematic relationship between father and son is intensely highlighted. In another narrative plane, Tao, overwhelmed with guilt, gets increasingly estranged from his life partner. Unhappy in her married life, she decides to go on a journey to find her beloved son, taken by the authorities after a tragic accident. Wrapped in mystery, the story of the journey and the attempt to find answers keep the reader in suspense. Also, the relationship between man and nature is very well illustrated. The book emphasizes that nature lives and can survive very well without the human component, but man without nature is inevitably doomed to death.

A tense moment of the novel is the apocalyptic description of Beijing - a ghost town with deserted streets, closed shops, abandoned subway stations and hospitals where the elderly are left behind and thus sentenced to death. People were forced to leave their homes in order to be relocated to agricultural fields, dealing exclusively with manual pollination.

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The key to the survival of the human species lies in the very universe of bees. As the novel points out, they live for the community, they cooperate and sacrifice for the collective. By itself, one bee means nothing, being so small and insignificant, but together with all the others, it is everything, because they all together

form the hive. Following the example of bees, man must avoid being an individualist. He should be aware of the need for community, he should learn to be part of a whole. Even if the future seems bleak and distressing, the novel ends on a positive note, hope being the leitmotif of human existence.

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