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Maja Lunde, *Blå* [*The End of the Ocean*], Oslo, Aschehoug & Co., 2017, 216 p.

The End of the Ocean is the second novel in Maja Lunde's *klimakvartetten* (climate quartet), following her worldwide success *The History of Bees* (*Bienes Historie* in original Norwegian, *Istoria Albinelor* in Romanian; the novel has been translated into Romanian by Professor Sanda Tomescu Baciu and published in 2019). The original Norwegian title of *The End of the Ocean* is *Blå*, meaning "blue", a fit title since the novel revolves around the importance of water for human and non-human beings, but also for maintaining the balance of our ecosystems.

The book is constructed in the same manner as *The History of Bees*, but this time the reader is confronted with only two storylines, instead of three. The first one revolves around Signe, a 70-year-old woman who sets out on a voyage to France, where she plans to meet her long lost lover, Magnus. The action takes place in present day Norway, but Lunde often uses flashbacks to familiarise the reader with Signe and Magnus' past. The two lovers met in college, and they were both

environmental activists. However, they began to drift apart when Magnus changed his attitude regarding the conservation of the glaciers and agreed with the selling of ice they fought so hard to preserve.

The second narrative, set in a near, dystopian future (to be more precise, the action takes place in the year 2041 in France) follows the story of David and his young daughter, Lou. They are climate refugees, constantly on the go, running away from the drought and the wildfires that threaten the whole continent. Separated from the rest of their family (David's wife and other child, a boy), the father-daughter duo undergo famine and starvation, thirst, and the constant anxiety of having to live from day to day, without any certainty of what to-

morrow will bring. Just like in *The History of Bees*, the stories will eventually come together, as everything is ultimately connected. What Magnus and Signe did a few decades ago turns out to be extremely important for David and his daughter, Lou.



Climate change, the extinction of various animal species, and environmental pollution have become important themes in contemporary literature. Lunde's *klimakvarttet* has been categorised by critics and readers as *cli-fi*, or climate fiction. Even though this type of discourse was initially typical for American literature, since the *wasteland* as a space of non-life and absence is a concept profoundly ingrained in the American collective imaginary and literary tradition, climate fiction (or ecofiction) has entered the European literary scene as well.

Maja Lunde is one of the writers who tackle these issues. The aforementioned «wasteland» is present in *The End of the Ocean*, as the characters witness the disintegration of the natural world around them. Signe eventually loses her dear glacier, which she named Blå, while David watches the vegetation around him die out, turning the once green, lively terrains into barren land.

But Signe's Blå seems to be more than just a glacier. Lunde describes it not as an inanimate piece of the natural decorum, but as a real, living creature: "Blå is a sad creature" (179) Signe says, adding that her glacier is a "big, quiet animal" (5). Water (in all its forms) thus becomes a living force, a breathing organism that has a life on its own. The nonhuman environment is therefore not only a framing device, but an active presence, according to Greg Garrard, one of the most important researchers in the field of ecocriticism at the moment. Because of this, the glacier's demise becomes even more traumatic for Signe, since she loses a friend and a companion, and not only a mere block of ice.

If *The History of Bees* tackles, apart from climate change and pollution, the "question of the animal", as Cary Wolfe

calls it, insofar as it illustrates how important a role bees play in maintaining the balance of our ecosystems and how vital their work is for us human beings, *The End of the Ocean* does not discuss non-human beings explicitly. However, there are a few hints in the text that allude to this type of discourse, as Signe and David do often think of themselves as animals following their instinctual impulses, survival and reproduction. The border between human and non-human is often erased in this novel, leaving space for a world where these two dimensions are inextricably intertwined. Lunde herself mentions in an interview (from October 2019) that this was one of her primary intentions when writing the novel, to disclose this side of our human nature and the whole debate that arises from the nature vs. nurture/culture dichotomy.

Apart from all these motifs that revolve around climate change and the destruction of the natural environment, *The End of the Ocean* is ultimately a novel about the constant yearning to connect with those around us. The Anthropocene may have rendered us disconnected from the *Other* (be it human, like for example climate refugees, or non-human). In an unstable, unpredictable world like that of Signe or David, the characters tend to be decentralized and their sense of identity becomes fragmented. For Signe and David it becomes almost impossible to connect with their dear ones, both physically (since both Magnus and David's wife are far away from them), but also emotionally. Just like in *The History of Bees*, Lunde creates in this novel an excellent depiction of the dynamics of our personal relationships in a world where you are essentially on your own.

Lunde's candid and raw writing style has the power of immersing the reader

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into the story. The vivid descriptions of the landscapes create both awe and fear in those who read the novel, since we witness the greatness of nature being slowly replaced by wastelands and barrenness.

The parallel structure of the novel conveys this duality between balance and chaos, between man as an all-powerful, destructive force, and man as just another piece of the ecosystem.

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