

A reception study of Maja Lunde's *The History of Bees* in Norway, the English-speaking countries and Romania

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1. Introduction

Maja Lunde (born 1975) started studying literature and psychology at the University of Oslo in 1996, and then majored in media and communication, where she mainly focused on film and film history. In 2009, she became a screenwriter for various TV-productions, such as *Barnas Supershow* (“Children’s Supershow”) for NRK Super and the series *Hjem* (“Home”) and *Side om Side* (“Side by Side”) for NRK 1. She had her literary debut in 2012 with the children’s books *Barnas Supershow* (“Children’s Supershow”) and *Over grensen* (“Border Crossing”). The follow-ups were the young adult novel *Battle* (2014) and the children book series *Verdens kuleste gjeng* (*The Coolest Gang in the World*), published from 2015 until 2017.

Her breakthrough novel *Bienes Historie*, also her first book for adults, was published in 2015 by the Norwegian publishing house Aschehoug. Its English translation *The History of Bees* came two years later, in 2017. This is the first book of the so-called “climate quartet” that for the time being also includes the novels *Blå* (2017), published in English with the title *The End of the Ocean* (2019) and *Przewalski’s Hest* (2019). The “climate quartet” is a project idea born out of Lunde’s interest for the environment and it is meant to encompass four novels that focus on climate-related topics: “Insects, water, animals, and finally seeds and all things that grow” (Lunde, May 18, 2017). The Norwegian author was supposed to publish the fourth book in 2020, but due to the coronavirus pandemic, she stopped working on it. Instead, she wrote the autobiographical book *De første dagene* (“The First Days”) in which she documents her experiences during the start of the pandemic (Pettersen and Bringedal 2020).

The History of Bees comprises three stories connected by the themes of parenthood and beekeeping. In 1852, William, an English biologist lies in bed as he suffers from depression. He has a passion for insects, especially bees. As he could not continue his studies under a renowned insect researcher, he fell into depression. However, he wants to restart his work and have breakthrough discoveries. In 2007, George Savage is a beekeeper who lives in the USA. His son, Tom, is a university student, but his father would like him to step into his shoes and become a beekeeper. The tense relationship between the two redeems when Tom eventually gets involved in his father’s business as Colony Collapse Disorder strikes, killing their bees. In 2098, Tao and other women work with hand pollination in a famine-stricken China, long after

the bees went extinct. Tao and her husband Kuan have a three-year old boy Wei-Wen. As Wei-Wen mysteriously disappears, his mother sets out in search of him.

The three storylines are interconnected, although they are separated in time and space. William Savage's Standard Hive and its drawings are passed down through generations as his daughter Charlotte takes them with her in the USA. As George discovers the drawings, he builds his hives after William Savage's Standard Hive. Due to the mass death of the bees George experiences, Tom, his son, writes a book about it which Tao reads decades later, both as a child and as an adult, leaving a mark on her.

The idea for this novel came after Lunde watched the documentary film *More than Honey* (2012) which draws on a real global phenomenon, the extinction of bees (Bjørnshau 2015). This particular topic has been widely covered in the worldwide media in the recent years in the wake of the increasing effects of climate change. News about the alarming state of the planet have coincided with the emergence of climate fiction, a new type of literature that started growing internationally during the 2010's.

The History of Bees initially had a great appeal to the readers in Norway, receiving the Norwegian Booksellers' Prize in 2015. The novel then extended its success internationally, being translated to more than thirty languages. Never before had a debut novel by a Norwegian fiction writer been sold to one of the world's largest publishers, Simon & Schuster (Bok365, June 18, 2016). The US-based publishing company made the book available in the entire Anglosphere. One of the greatest accomplishments of the novel was being 2017's bestselling book in Germany, the largest European book market. The novel also made its way into smaller language markets, such as the Romanian one. Four years after the publication in its original language, the translation of Lunde's novel into Romanian was published by Humanitas Fiction under the title *Istoria albinelor* in 2019. The book caught the attention of the readers, becoming one of the bestsellers at the Bookfest International Book Fair held in Romania's capital city, Bucharest, in 2019 (Marinescu 2019). The novel's exceptional commercial performance was accompanied by the literary recognition of the journalistic and literary critics across the world. With its captivating and engaging stories revolving around the bee motif, the novel attained the "international bestseller" status turning Maja Lunde into a high-profile author.

1.1 Research question

In this master thesis, the main goal is to examine the journey of Maja Lunde's *The History of Bees* from the publication in its original language to becoming an international bestseller. This approach will allow me to investigate the complex network of agents that shape the reception of a novel in a broader geographical context. To study the travel of the book beyond national borders, I will use the theoretical framework developed by Pierre Bourdieu and Pascale Casanova in the field of sociology of literature. Therefore, this study will not focus on the content of the novel, but rather on its reception and the multitude of factors that shape it. I aim to analyze the reception of the novel in Norway, Romania and the following English-speaking countries: The United States, The United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and Canada. In order to set the background for the discussion of the reception, I will start with a brief introduction of climate fiction, a label that has often been brought into discussion in relation to the novel. I will then proceed with the analysis of the reviews from the three linguistic territories to get an impression of the overall critical assessment of the novel. I seek to answer questions such as: How did the reviewers evaluate this book? What are the noticeable similarities and differences in the reception? On the basis of the review analysis, I will reconstruct the ascension of the novel in the transnational literary field, by focusing on the agents that enabled the book to traverse from its source culture to its target cultures, in form of translation. This project does not aim to account for the implications of the translation of a literary text, such as meaning alteration or other textual aspects. Furthermore, I will address the genre aspect, which is a central part of the reception.

1.2 *The History of Bees* in context

In his book *Anthropocene Fictions* (2015), the climate literature researcher Adam Trexler operates with the term “Anthropocene”, popularized by the Nobel Prize winner Paul Crutzen. In his article “Geology of Mankind” (2002), Crutzen uses the term to name the current era of Earth's history that has been unequivocally marked by human activity (23). There is a scientific consensus that the greatest challenge of our time is that the emission of green house gasses has led to rising global temperatures. In the early 2000's, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change admitted that humanity was confronting global warming, as natural

catastrophes such as floods, droughts, forest fires and heat waves became more frequent and more violent. This global phenomenon has not only been subjected to media scrutiny, but it has also given birth to new cultural preoccupations. The body of literary texts dealing with the climate change threat has considerably increased. Adam Trexler estimated a number of 150 climate novels published from the 1950's up until 2015, representing the "considerable archive of climate change fiction" (2015, 8). While the 1970's and 1980's saw an increase in novels dealing with environmental issues, such as deforestation, thinning of the ozone layer or loss of natural habitats, it was the first decade of the 2000's that marked the emergence of a new category of fiction about climate change. T.C. Boyle's *A Friend of the Earth* (2000), Saci Lloyd's *The Carbon Diaries 2015* (2008) or Ian McEwan's *Solar* (2010) are representative climate novels of that period.

In order to describe this new literary category, in 2007, the journalist Dan Bloom coined the term "cli-fi" (climate fiction), which Adeline Johns-Putra defines as "fiction concerned with anthropogenic climate change or global warming as we now understand it" (2016, 267). According to her, climate fiction is "a new category of contemporary literature" rather than a new genre (267), since the climate change topic is common "in many genres, for example science fiction, dystopia (themselves two genres given too much cross-fertilization, fantasy, thriller, even romance" (267). In the context of the climate challenge of the contemporary world, a phenomenon that has become accessible via the scientific discourse, a new literary imaginary has emerged. Because of the scientific nature of the climate change knowledge, the process of narrating it in an imaginative way might be cumbersome (Goodbody and Johns-Putra 2019, 235). It is therefore why contemporary literature has needed to adapt in order to represent the complexity of the phenomenon.

In this regard, in the introduction to his pivotal book *Anthropocene Fictions* (2015), Adam Trexler argues that climate change effects have truly made their presence felt in our lives, thus the contemporary novel, as a way of representing these effects, has suffered generic transformations:

In the face of these challenges, climate novels must change the parameters of storytelling, even to draw on the tropes of recognizable narratives. More often than not, the narrative difficulties of the Anthropocene threaten to rupture the defining features of the genre: literary novels bleed into science fiction; suspense novels have surprising

elements of realism; realist depictions of everyday life involuntarily become biting satire. For these reasons, novels about the Anthropocene cannot be easily placed into discrete generic pigeonholes. (14)

Climate fiction addresses the fact that climate change is also an ecological phenomenon, an effect of a changing global picture in which the human and the non-human systems are inextricably linked. Contrary to the canonical fiction in which human character plays a central role, climate fiction encompasses a wide range of characters and non-human elements that coexist, allowing it to “explore diverse human responses” to the anthropogenic climate change threat (14).

Adeline Johns-Putra describes the trends that climate change fiction has developed in the early 2010’s. She makes a distinction between novels that have contemporary and future settings. The novels in the first category depict realist or very near-future worlds, whereby climate change is “an ethical, political, or economic dilemma for the individual” (Goodbody and Johns-Putra 2019, 237). These novels are based on a conventional way of sparking empathy with the characters who are emotionally engaged with the climate change problem (237). On the other hand, the novels with futuristic settings present climate change beyond its psychological or moral implications, usually as the cause of a global collapse of human society (Johns-Putra 2016, 269). These futuristic setting novels fall into the category of speculative climate fiction, which is non-mimetic in nature, i.e. it does not aim to represent the ordinary reality of the readers. This type of novel envisions a world that has suffered transformations due to the environmental disasters caused by climate change. One could further distinguish between dystopian and post-apocalyptic novels. The dystopian novels depict a negative future, whereas the post-apocalyptic ones present “a future created by an apocalyptic event” (268). They usually overlap, as “many apocalyptic futures are also negative and therefore dystopian” (268).

The overlap is noticeable in *The History of Bees*, as the novel’s dystopian third narrative, set in China in 2098, presents the post-apocalyptic future, namely the aftermath of the bees’ mass extinction, also known as the “collapse”. This event was caused by poisonous insecticides, *Varroa destructor* (a parasite), extreme weather and single-crop agriculture, which are outcomes of human activity. Colony Collapse Disorder or CCD is not only a fictive event unfortunately, but a real-life phenomenon defined as “sudden, dramatic, and unexplained

losses of honeybee colonies” (Nimmo 2015, 2). Research has shown that the decline of the bees is a result of climate change. As the flowering times become more shifting, the pollinators’ resources get dramatically reduced (Memmott et al. 2007, 710). The die-off of honeybees is an alarming sign of climate change’s impact and it is part of the mass extinction introduced in the report from the United Nations Environment program (2010): “Current evidence demonstrates that a sixth major extinction of biological diversity is underway. The Earth is losing between one and ten percent of its biodiversity per decade, mostly due to habitat loss, pest invasion, pollution, over-harvesting and disease” (1). The bees have played an important role for human communities since time immemorial because of their pollination and honey production (Portus and McGinn 2019, 3).

According to Johns-Putra, one of the common aspects of recent climate fiction is “the importance of intergenerational obligation in order to survive climate devastation” (269). She gives two examples of books that thematize this idea: T. C. Boyle’s *A Friend of the Earth* (2000) and Barbara Kingsolver *Flight Behavior* (2012). The parent-offspring bond in the context of a global catastrophe also plays a significant role in Lunde’s novel. The best example is Tao’s story, as she feels responsible to offer her son education and financial possibilities so that he will not end up working with hand pollination.

In Norway, the interest of the writers for environmental issues started to amplify in the 1970’s. Erik Dammann’s book *Fremtiden i våre hender* (*The Future in Our Hands*, 1972) gave the name to the environmental organization he founded in 1974, that still exists nowadays. Other novels, such as *Uår: Aftenlandet* (1974), *Uår: Sweetwater* (1976), written by Knut Faldbakken were pioneering efforts for the literature that takes up environmental dilemmas. The Norwegian writers’ preoccupation for this topic continued, but the early 2010’s saw the emergence of a new wave of climate literature that consistently expanded (Hennig, Jonasson and Degerman 2018, 7). Norwegian writers have demonstrated their involvement by founding “Fofatternes klimaakjson” (The Norwegian Writer’s Climate Campaign) in 2013. Their goal is to inspire climate action through literature, basing their project on the Norwegian constitutional right of living in a healthy environment where natural resources are carefully utilized.

The History of Bees received attention from the academia as well. The novel became the study object of several Nordic literature students in Norway. In 2019, Johnsen Mariell, student at University of Agder, wrote her thesis under the title “The society’s underlying

beehive structure: An eco-feminist reading of *The History of Bees* by Maja Lunde”¹. Eline Lund, student at the Faculty of Humanities of the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), wrote her bachelor thesis “The History of bees– an ecocritical reading”². In 2020, Siri Friis Nyberg wrote her master thesis in Nordic Literature with the title “Times are brought together: A study of Maja Lunde’s *The History of Bees* (2015), *The End of the Ocean* (2017), *Przewalskis hest* (2019)”³. All these academic papers treat Lunde’s novel as climate fiction, using ecocriticism as their theoretical framework. Outside Norway, samples from the book were used in a reading workshop coordinated by Rosamund Portus and Claire McGinn, eventually presented in the article “Bees, Extinction and Ambient Soundscapes: An Exploratory Environmental Communication Workshop” (2019). The BI Norwegian Business School organized a seminar about bees on November 7, 2019, opened by the President of The Republic of Slovenia, H.E. Borut Pahoro and His Majesty The King of Norway. Maja Lunde gave a talk about literature and the ecological crisis, along with other Norwegian and Slovenian politicians (BI Norwegian Business School 2020).

1.3 The international literary field

Institutional authority and the accumulation of prestige influence the reception of a book translation in an international context. In order to understand the social and economic dynamics of a widely translated book that circulates in the contemporary world’s market, one can utilize the sociological perspectives in literature pioneered by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. His model of the literary field describes a space with unequal resources dominated by various agents, such as authors, publishers and critics, who struggle to gain economic and symbolic capital (1983, 319). Applying this theory in the field of publishing, one can identify two opposite poles: the small-scale and large-scale productions (Bourdieu 2008, 128). Publishers that operate at the pole of large-scale production target the general audience, and therefore they normally invest in bestseller books for profit (economic capital). On the other hand, the small-scale publishers seek autonomy from the market and the state, as they are interested in books with literary quality (symbolic capital). Pascale Casanova extends

¹ “Samfunnets underliggende bikubestruktur: En økofeministisk lesning av Bienes historie (2015) av Maja Lunde”

² “Bienes historie-ein økokritisk lesnad”

³ “Der tider føres sammen En lesning av Maja Lundes Bienes historie (2015), Blå (2017) og Przewalskis hest (2019)”

Bourdieu's model to the international level in her book *La République mondiale des Lettres* (1999), published in English with the title *World Republic of Letters* (2004). The international literary field, or the "world republic of letters", in her terms, is influenced by unequal power poles, the "dominant and dominated literary spaces" (2004, 83). Within this dichotomous structure, the dominated literary languages possess little literary capital and are less known, while the dominant languages exert an undisputable power because of their age and number of texts written in them (Casanova 2010, 289). Writers in a peripheral language cannot immediately achieve consecration in the international literary field. Therefore, the translations of their books into a major literary language strengthen their status in the world literary space, giving them "access to literary visibility and existence" (Casanova 2004, 135). If a book possesses prestige after its translation in a central language market, other publishing houses around the world are more likely to purchase the translation rights of that book (Heilbron 1999, 436). The English language occupies the hyper-central role in the world literary system. It is the most translated language in the world, with "50-70 percent of the published translations being made from English" (Heilbron 1999, 434). According to Casanova, the regions of the world where people speak the same language form a linguistic territory (Casanova 2004, 116). The Anglophone area comprises the regions where a significant part of the population speaks the English language. The countries with the largest number of native English-speakers are the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Ireland. Due to the colonial past of the United Kingdom, English is widely spoken in other countries in Asia and Africa. The Anglophone world has two literary centers: New York and London. These cities have threatened the position of Paris as the capital of "the world republic of letters". The French city occupied a central position not only because of its prolific literary production, but also because of its function as an intermediary center through which peripheral texts pass to achieve consecration. This shift of power in the literary field was caused by the rise of the commercial model of the American publishing industry. Usually situated in New York, publishing conglomerates promote popular books that follow pre-existing formulas and appeal to the mass readership, lacking aesthetic innovation. These books are distributed to the national markets, achieving rapid commercial success (Casanova 2004, 171). The dominance of the Americanized large-scale production creates an unequal balance of power between the countries inside the Anglophone literary field. Australia and Canada are typically dominated by

the United States and the United Kingdom. Canadian and Australian books usually fail to achieve consecration without passing through the US or the UK (Driscoll and Sedo 2020, 12).

Under the influence of the increasing exchange of cultural goods between regions of the world, literary products have become accessible in the peripheral areas of the international literary field, such as Romania. Member country of the European Union since 2007, Romania is situated at the crossroads of Eastern, Central and Southeastern Europe. The official language is Romanian, a Romance language spoken by approximately twenty-four million people, mainly in Romania and Moldova⁴. On the worldwide literary map, Romania occupies a peripheral position, with a smaller literary production in comparison to the other European countries, such as France, England or Germany. Book translations and their reception into smaller languages, such as Romanian have been neglected by literary scholars. The sociologist Johan Heilbron puts forward a core-periphery model of the international translation system, in which peripheral countries tend to be more internationally oriented, thus the import of cultural products is higher than in the countries with a central cultural position (1999, 439). In Romania, the proportion of book translations amounts to approximately fifty percent of all sold books. The Romanian public thus prefers both foreign and local authors almost equally (Croitoru and Becut 2017, 237).

Casanova's approach to the dynamics of the literary field can serve as a useful theoretical tool in my study of the status of Lunde's novel *The History of Bees* in the three language markets. On the basis of the press reviews and other articles about the book, I will examine the international consecration process of Maja Lunde's novel. I argue that the international journey of the book translation follows both Casanova's model of dominated-dominant languages and Johan's Heilbron's core-periphery model. First, the Norwegian novel achieved consecration in the world literary field after its translation into German and English, two dominant languages, moving from periphery to the core. Eventually, this achievement led to the movement in the opposite direction, from the core to the periphery, represented by the Romanian language market.

⁴ *Britannica Academic*, s.v. "Romanian language" accessed October 28, 2020

1.4 The book review genre and accumulation of prestige

The reception study of a novel entails a content analysis of the media coverage the novel received. Book reviews are the most widespread tools of promoting and discussing literature, but they are not the only texts that can provide us with invaluable data about the patterns of reception. Background articles, features, bestseller lists can contextualize the novel and reflect the way readers interact with the literary text. Since the book review genre constitutes the main part of my material, it is thus necessary to have a deeper understanding of it. Book reviewers affiliated to institutional contexts, such as newspapers, magazines and journals, are central agents in the literary field. They have the authority to select the literary products that stand out from the large pool of newly published books, thus giving them artistic legitimacy. In order to achieve consecration, books travel through different forms of literary criticism. The Dutch literature researcher C.J. van Rees distinguished between three main types: academic, essayistic and journalistic (1983, 399). The academic critics take longer time to write their texts than the press reviewers. Their literary critique has a greater relevance for fellow scholars than the general public, as they have a substantial professional background. While critics write in literary jargon, journalistic reviewers have a widely accessible language (Pool 2007, 10). The essayistic reviews are usually published in monthly or quarterly publications that are more specialized. They are aimed at a smaller audience that is interested in or has some background in literature. These readers are not looking for reading recommendations. The essayistic reviewers usually select the books that already received attention from the journalistic reviewers, usually months after the publication (Chong 2020, 4).

The defining characteristic of journalistic reviews is that they focus on new books, without basing their evaluation on theories, unlike academic criticism. The journalistic review is the most common type of review, appearing in daily or weekly publications with the aim of reviewing newly published books (Chong 2020, 4). The process of reviewing starts with the selection of the “works of fiction or nonfiction thought to be culturally important and of sufficient interest to a publication’s readership” (Murray 2018, 114). Book reviews are written about recently published books and their length varies from 250 to 1500 words (Nischik 2016, 124). Novel reviews, for example, have a promotional function as they are written “upon publication of the book or relatively soon after” (125). In order to have a large audience, they are usually published in newspapers or magazines. Written in a short amount of time, these

reviews place the book in the literary context by associating it with other similar works (125). A book review should catch the reader's attention and contextualize the book. The review should be descriptive; as the reader needs to know what the book is about, but also evaluative, in the sense that it informs whether the book is worth-reading. The reviewer's statements should be based on a solid argumentation and the reader needs to be made aware of the reviewer's literary inclinations that might influence the evaluation of the book. The book is the only analysis topic, not the writer's personal life (Nischik 2016, 128).

Most of the print-media reviewers are freelancers with other literary-sector jobs, but their authority hinges on the status of the newspaper or magazine. Reviewers writing for smaller publications take the role of the "reader's friend: scouting on the reader's behalf and advising honestly on which books are worth the reader's (presumably) limited time and budget" (Murray 2018, 114-115). Conversely, the reviewers that work for major outlets can considerably influence not only the fate of the book, but also that of the author (115). If a high-profile outlet reviews a book, either positively or negatively, the author's prospects of publishing more books in the future automatically increase.

The importance of individual book reviews arises from their contribution to create critical consensus, which is described as "a single intersubjective valuation of a book's quality" (Chong 2020, 56). The critical consensus starts at the level of journalistic reviews, as the book moves through the other two forms of literary criticism (essayistic and academic) in order to achieve artistic legitimacy (Chong 2020, 56). This structural dynamic has, however, changed in the era of Internet. The traditional newspaper media have declined due to digitization, resulting in the reduction or even elimination of the book review sections. This has coincided with the emergence of online platforms dedicated to literature. Social network websites, such as Goodreads, online marketplaces, such as Amazon.com, book blogs, online forums or YouTube channels have become arenas for reader-reviewers (also called amateur reviewers) where they can both share their critical thoughts on books, but also connect with other readers. The appearance of "reader reviews" has contributed to the democratization of book reviewing, since the threshold of writing and publishing a review is relatively low on the digital platforms. Nevertheless, the amateurs have been accused of downgrading book reviewing. On the one hand, they have the tendency to treat literary fiction as entertainment rather than as an intellectual and aesthetical experience. On the other hand, the reader reviewers lack the control

of an editor, who can proofread and fact-check the content, resulting in low-quality reviews that fail to enrich the literary discourse (Chong 2020, 123). Despite the increase in online reviewing, the legitimacy of professional reviewers has not dwindled dramatically. They have also transitioned into the digital world, writing for online magazines or cultural websites. However, this does not apply to online reviewers, since they cannot easily make their way into print reviewing (Murray 2018, 121). The Internet has rather come to complement the production of reviews, as audiences interested in literature consult both Internet critics and professional reviewers (Verboord 2010, 632).

The accessibility of worldwide media has also resulted in the intensification of transnational cultural exchange. On the national level, foreign literature has started to compete with the domestic one, not only for commercial success, but also for the critics' attention (Janssen 2009, 355). The degree of critical attention from the reviewers' part depends on the cultural position of the territory concerned. This is the case of the English-speaking world, where translations are rare, thus the limited coverage of foreign literature (Heilbron 1999, 439).

The fact that Lunde's novel garnered reviews and media attention in the English-speaking world is relatively unusual for a foreign writer. Not only did it receive attention from professional critics, but also from its average readers who made use of online platforms to discuss the book. For example, on Goodreads, the world's largest site for book recommendations, Lunde's novel received a staggering number of 1423 customer reviews in English, seventy-two reviews in Norwegian and thirty in Romanian (Goodreads n.d.). These reviews were written by private consumers that lack professional background. Although there have been numerous studies suggesting that popularity on the online platform Goodreads can generate great sales, one may fail to consider the role that book reviewing plays for the consecration of the book (Chong 2020, 4). Bourdieu describes the cultural field as the "economic world reversed" as the preoccupation of artistic legitimacy outweighs commercial success (1983, 311). I have thus decided not to include customer reviews from digital platforms such as Amazon.com or Goodreads.

1.5 Method

This paper is a single case study of the transnational reception of Maja Lunde's *The History of Bees* in three distinct language territories: Norway, the English-speaking countries and Romania. My goal is to illustrate the journey of the book using Bourdieu's and Casanova's theories about the world literary field.

In order to get an understanding of the general critical reception, I will first analyze the reviews written about the novel following the chronological order of their publication: starting from Norway, continuing with the English-speaking countries and finishing with the Romanian reviews. The reviews will be categorized into three main groups, positive, negative and mixed, basing my judgment on the overall evaluation of the book. A review is "positive" if the reviewed book is clearly appreciated and praised. A negative review has an overall critical tone, where any form of appreciation is miniscule or lacks altogether. A mixed review deals with the book either neutrally or in a balanced way, comprising both approving and negative statements.

For the Norwegian critical reception, I have included reviews from both national and regional publications across Norway. On the national level, there are the daily newspapers *Aftenposten*, *Dagbladet*, *VG* (tabloid newspaper), *Klassekampen*, *Dagsavisen* and *Dagens Næringsliv* (business newspaper). The regional newspapers that reviewed Lunde's novel are *Adresseavisen* (Trondheim), *Stavanger Aftenblad* and *Fædrelandsvennen* (Kristiansand). I have also included the website Littkritikk.no, where professional literary critics and journalists review fiction books.

The English reception will be based on the reviews gathered from the following Anglophone countries: the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. I have decided to treat the English reviews of the novel as a single corpus for two reasons. On the one hand, the English-speaking countries form, in Casanova's terms, a "linguistic territory", which is in this case the so-called Anglophone area. She describes this as a space that shares a common cultural framework: "a world having its own pantheon and prizes, its own favored genres, its own distinctive traditions and internal rivalries" (2004, 117). On the other hand, the scarce number of reviews from certain Anglophone countries, such as

the United Kingdom, would have made it impossible for me to draw any consistent conclusions about the national reception of the novel. Nevertheless, I have to express my slight reservation regarding this approach. For one thing, the countries within the Anglophone literary field establish their own hierarchy of power. It goes without saying that, for example, the United States, as a powerful cultural center will have a larger concentration of institutions involved in literature than smaller regions, such as New Zealand. For another thing, the reviews from these different countries will reflect the distinct local contexts, from a literary, social and even political perspective.

Three of the reviews selected from the United States were in publications targeted at a readership with a specific interest in literature: the monthly book review publication *Book Page*, the weekly news magazine *Publishers Weekly*, mainly known for reviewing books before their publication and the book review magazine *Kirkus Reviews*. The other US publications are the daily newspaper *Los Angeles Times* and the magazine *The Atlantic*. The Canadian publications that reviewed Maja Lunde's novel are the literary journal of the ALECC, the Association for Literature, Environment, and Culture in Canada, *The Goose*, and the newspaper *The National Post*. From New Zealand, I found two reviews: one on the popular news media website *Stuff* and the other in the weekly magazine *The New Zealand Listener*. The only British review encountered in my search was from the regional daily newspaper *Lancashire Evening Post*.

The Romanian critical reception will be based on four reviews, selected from the literary magazines *Viața Românească* ("The Romanian Life") and *România Literară* ("Literary Romania"), and the online cultural publications *Scena9* ("Scene9") and *O mie de semne* ("One thousand signs"). The monthly literary magazine *Viața Românească* ("The "Romanian Life") and the weekly literary magazine *România Literară* ("Literary Romania") are both Bucharest-based print publications with a long tradition in literary criticism, both being edited by the Writers' Union of Romania. *Scena9* ("Scene9") is an online publication run by a network of Romanian journalists who cover cultural news both locally and internationally. *O mie de semne* ("One thousand signs") is an online cultural platform where the Romanian author Gelu Diaconu writes about literary news. The selection was made on the basis of the professional background of the reviewers and the quality of the content. Since the number of Romanian professional reviews is limited, I considered including amateur reviews from book blogs,

which are more numerous. Nevertheless, due to their highly descriptive and predominantly promotional nature, I have excluded this type of reviews from my analysis.

Afterwards, I will discuss the interplay of factors that shape the transnational journey of the book based on the media coverage. Starting from Johan Heilbron's theory about the periphery-core-periphery flow of translation, my aim is to reconstruct the consecration process of the novel in the three languages. This part of my research draws on features, promotional articles, author interviews or any other type of book coverage that charts the success of the book. A special focus lies on the main recurring aspect referenced and discussed in the media coverage of the book: the climate fiction concept. By identifying and addressing the usage of the term, I aim to study the implications it has for the reception.

I am clearly aware that this approach is not faultless, and that it cannot provide definitive answers regarding the literary phenomenon that is *The History of Bees*, mainly due to the following reasons. Firstly, since I lack German language skills, this research does not include a closer examination of the novel's reception in Germany, although it is the largest European book market where Lunde's novel had a tremendous commercial performance. I will, however, provide some explanations about the implications of the novel's success in Germany. Secondly, I acknowledge that the reception of the novels *Blå* (2017) and *Przewalski's Hest* (2019), could have helped in understanding Lunde's climate quartet in its entirety, but this would be beyond the scope of my thesis.

2. The critical reception

2.1 The Norwegian reception

The Norwegian reception is predominantly positive. The reviews from *Dagbladet*, *Klassekampen* and *Stavanger Aftenblad* are outright positive, whereas the other three (*Aftenposten*, *VG* and *Dagsavisen*) include commentaries and suggestions, but have an overall positive estimation. Two of the reviews (*Adresseavisen* and *Dagens Næringsliv*) are mixed, as they include both appreciation and faultfinding.

Positive comments

Most of the reviews lavish praise on Lunde's storytelling talent. The *VG* reviewer points out her descriptive, yet understandable way of writing⁵: "Her writing is easy to understand, cinematic and colorful, with a richness of details and love for her novel characters"⁶ (November 23, 2015). Gerd Elin Stava Sandve from *Dagsavisen* praises Lunde's effective writing skills:

Lunde is an effective storyteller that keeps the reader hooked with amazing endings on every chapter before switching to the next person. The tempo is high, the drama clear, the descriptions of the environment are thorough enough for one to imagine the setting and the situation, without taking too long.⁷ (August 5, 2015)

The novel's construction has also been positively received. Jan Askelund from *Stavanger Aftenblad* describes it as an "impressive and warm novel construction"⁸ (September 4, 2015). In the same vein, the *Dagsavisen* reviewer writes about how Lunde manages to find the right language, avoiding clichés:

The language is functional prose, without major fluctuations. Lunde's strength is in composition rather than groundbreaking original language, so she does well avoiding

⁵ All the following translations from Norwegian and Romanian into English are mine, unless otherwise indicated

⁶ "Hun skriver lettfattelig, filmatisk og billedrikt, med stor detaljrikdom og en god person kjærlighet til sine romanskikkelser."

⁷ "Lunde er en effektiv forteller som holder leseren hektet med spennende avslutninger på hvert kapittel før hun bytter til neste person. Tempoet er høyt, dramaet tydelig, miljøbeskrivelsene er grundige nok til at man ser settingen og situasjonen for seg, uten at de dveler for lenger."

⁸ "imponerende og varm romankonstruksjon"

the big linguistic twists and turns, and thus steering clear of the worst clichés.⁹ (August 5, 2015)

The language aspect is also appreciated by the *Aftenposten* reviewer: “*The History of Bees* is characterized by skilled craftsmanship throughout. The language is solid and well-crafted, and each story has its own distinctive tone”¹⁰ (August 1, 2015). The *Adresseavisen* reviewer praises the language as well: “The text is linguistically solid and nuanced: all the narrators’ voices are unique”¹¹ (August 10, 2015). Janneken Øverland from *Klassekampen* notes the linguistic particularities used in each part of the novel: “It is a joy to see how Lunde, purely linguistically, stretches a normal Norwegian language register ranging from a laborious 1800s-like, hesitant style, via a broad, a-ending contemporary jargon, to a scanty, academic and staccato future conversation”¹² (August 15, 2020). Vilde Imeland from the regional newspaper *Fædrelandsvennen* writes in a favorable review that the novel stands out as good literature and that it successfully combines information of public interest with fiction (August 25, 2015).

In an attempt to accentuate the novel’s worth, the reviewers from *Aftenposten*, *Dagbladet* and *Adresseavisen* predict its international market success. In the *Adresseavisen* review, Maria Årolilja Rø writes that the novel was sold for the international market, stressing its great selling potential: “Already before the publication in Norwegian, *The History of Bees* is sold internationally, and the interest for the book is easily understandable. For better or worse, Lunde’s novel has many prerequisites for becoming a bestseller”¹³ (August 10, 2015). Rø compares the novel’s form and structure with David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas*, which similarly has multiple narrative threads (2004). In the beginning of her review in the Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten*, Erika Fatland mentions that the bees’ theme is far from new, as she gives a few examples of books and films about bees: Laline Paull’s *The Bees* (2014), the animation film *Bees movie* (2007), Sue Monk Kidd’s *The Secret Life of Bees* (2002). Jan

⁹ “Språket er funksjonell normalprosa, uten større utsving verken mot pluss eller minus. Lundes styrke er på komposisjon heller enn banebrytende originalt språk, da gjør hun lurt i å unngå de helt store språklige krumspringene, og dermed styre unna de verste klisjeene.”

¹⁰ “Bienes historie er preget av dyktig håndverk hele veien gjennom. Språket er solid og gjennomarbeidet, og hver historie har sin særegne tone.”

¹¹ “Språklig er teksten solid og nyansert; alle fortellerstemmene har sin egenart”

¹² “Det er en fryd å se hvordan Lunde, rent språklig, tøyer et normalnorsk register like fra en omstendig 1800-hundretalls-aktig, nølende stil, via en breial, a-endelsesrik samtidssjargong, til en nødtørftig, akademisert og stakkato framtidssamtale.”

¹³ “Allerede før utgivelsen på norsk er Bienes historie solgt til utlandet, og den store interessen for boka er lett å forstå. På godt og ondt har Lundes roman mange forutsetninger til å bli en bestselger.”

Askelund from *Stavanger Aftenblad* also compares Lunde's novel with Laline Paull's *The Bees*.

The reviews that mention Lunde's background are the following: *Aftenposten*, *Dagsavisen*, *Dagbladet*, *Klassekampen*, *Dagens Næringsliv*. Most of them perceive this as an asset of her writing this novel. However, the reviewer from *Dagens Næringsliv* makes a mixed commentary about this, emphasizing that the nature of the characters tends to be simplified: "Lunde has experience as a children's and young adult fiction writer and screenwriter for TV, and that is noticeable here. Here's a lot of action, drama and reader-friendliness. This also means that the characters can become excessively simple"¹⁴ (August 7, 2015). On the other hand, the *Dagsavisen* reviewer considers that "the background from TV and writing for younger readers could be observed in *The History of Bees* in a good way"¹⁵ (August 6, 2015).

Negative comments

One of the most commented aspects in the reviews is Lunde's tendency to over-explain. The reviews from *Adresseavisen*, *Aftenposten*, *Dagsavisen* and *Dagens Næringsliv* include comments about this. In her review for *Adresseavisen*, Maria Årolilja Rø writes that by over-explaining, Lunde misses the opportunity to engage the reader, as "the concrete presentation becomes too thorough for the reader's imagination to be given any leeway"¹⁶ (August 10, 2015).

According to Erika Fatland from *Aftenposten*, Lunde plays it safe linguistically and the end lacks the surprise effect, giving away too much instead of letting the reader imagine the universe of the characters (August 1, 2015). The *Dagsavisen* reviewer makes a point about the heavy-handed writing: "The characters could have had a little more 'meat on their bones', and the writer could at times trust a little more that the reader can understand without everything having to be explained"¹⁷ (August 5, 2015). Annette Orre makes a similar mixed comment regarding this aspect for *Littkritikk.no*, writing that "the author could have advantageously held

¹⁴ "Lunde har erfaring som barne- og ungdomsførfatter og manusförfatter for tv, og det merkes. Her er det masse driv og fart, dramatikk og lesevennlighet. Det betyr også at figurene kan bli i overkant enkle"

¹⁵ "Bakgrunnen fra TV, og fra skriving for yngre lesere, merkes i «Bienes historie» – på en bra måte"

¹⁶ "Den konkrete framstillingen blir for grundig til at leserfantasier får særlig spillerom"

¹⁷ "Figurene kunne med fordel hatt litt mer kjøtt på beina, og författeren kunne til tider stolt litt mer på at leseren forstår uten at alt må forklares"

back the generous amount of background information every first-person narrator provides the reader with, as it partly leads to less vivid and believable characters”¹⁸ (August 31, 2015).

Ola Hegdal from The Norwegian newspaper *Dagens Næringsliv* seems to disagree with the other reviewers whose assessments of the book are positive, as the subtitle of his mixed review is: “*The History of Bees* is not bad, but not nearly as good as the Norwegian reviewers want it to be”¹⁹ (August 7, 2015). Hegdal criticizes the composition, namely the way the plots intertwine towards the end: “Lunde has come up with a rather cunning plot, and towards the end, the connection between the three histories becomes clearer. Unfortunately, there are holes in the net here”²⁰ (2015). Furthermore, the reviewer comments on the low credibility of the scenario, claiming that “the premises for this particular version of the environmental decline are poorly founded”²¹. He downplays the gravity of the situation presented by Lunde, as he assumes that it is rather exaggerated. Hegdal ends his review in a balanced manner, both acknowledging the potential commercial success of the book and making a clear assessment about the status of the novel:

Maja Lunde has demonstrated with *The History of Bees* that she can carve out an easy-to-read and captivating history that tries to say something profound about important topics, and it is quite possible that the book stacks in the shops will be emptied. But this is not yet consummate literature.²² (August 7, 2015)

The subject of reviewing is sometimes mentioned in Lunde’s interviews, revealing the fact that she is indeed interested in the journalistic feedback her books receive. In a profile feature in the newspaper *Dagens Næringsliv*, Lunde confesses that she is interested in the negative feedback, and points out the fact that the same newspaper wrote a negative review about her novel *The History of Bees*. However, she has a neutral attitude towards this, as she does not comment

¹⁸ “Derimot kunne forfatteren med fordel holdt litt igjen med den rause mengden bakgrunnsinformasjon hver jegforteller rett som det er tilbyr leseren, et grep som i partier bidrar til å gjøre de tre hovedfigurene litt mindre levende og troverdige.”

¹⁹ “*Bienes Historie* er ikke dårlig, men heller ikke langt på nær som god som norske anmeldere vil ha det til”

²⁰ “Lunde har pønsket ut et ganske snedig plott, og mot slutten trer sammenhengen mellom de tre historiene tydeligere frem. Dessverre finnes det huller i nettet her”

²¹ “premissene for akkurat denne versjonen av verdens miljøundergang er svakt fundert”

²² “Maja Lunde har med *Bienes Historie* bevist at hun kan snekre sammen en lettlest og medrivende historie som prøver å si noe dyspyndig om viktige temaer, og det er fullt mulig at bokstablene i butikkene blir revet bort. Men formfullendt litteratur er det ennå ikke.”

further upon whether there was a misjudgment on behalf of the reviewer or not (Sæther and Dreyer, July 2, 2016).

Conclusion

The praise the novel received by the Norwegian reviewers focuses on Lunde's story-telling power. The novel has also received some negative comments revolving around the fact that the reader is not encouraged enough to use his or her imagination and that the characters are excessively simple.

2.2 The English reception

This chapter will focus on the reception of Maja Lunde's novel *The History of Bees* (2017) in the following English-speaking countries: The United States, UK, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. My text corpus consists of thirteen reviews from professional newspapers and magazines and one review from the literary website *The European Literature Network*. I have chosen to focus on the key aspects of these reviews, aiming to answer the following questions: What are the characteristics the reviewers appreciate? Is the success of the book mentioned? What kind of negative comments do they make?

Positive comments

Five of the fourteen reviews are clearly positive reviews. They underscore Lunde's research work, describing the novel as "an unusual, extensively researched, and gripping tale that tackles a pressing subject with compassion, nuance and insight" (Alexander Moran in the *Booklist*, August 2017). In the *Lancashire Evening Post* review, the novel is described as an "exciting blend of ecology, human relationships and soaraway" (September 22, 2017). One of the most common adjectives used to describe the book is "thought-provoking" (*Stuff*, *National Post*, *Lancashire Evening Post*). One aspect that the majority of the reviewers appreciate is the way Maja Lunde conveys the theme of human-nature connection, displayed by the characters' relations with the bees. In this regard, West Camel from the website European Literature Network's #RivetingReviews writes "Her point—that human interference in the natural order has far-reaching consequences we'd be wise to address now—is made adroitly and packs all the more punch because it is delivered via three personal, very human stories" (October 23, 2017).

Likewise, the *Publishers Weekly* reviewer commends Lunde on her storytelling's power to convey her message, writing in the end of the review: "Lunde's novel provides both a multifaceted story and a convincing and timely wake-up call" (September 18, 2017). The reviewer from the renowned magazine *Kirkus Reviews* concisely concludes their highly descriptive review with a favorable assessment of the book: "Illuminating if not much fun" (June 20, 2017).

Six reviews mention that *The History of Bees* is her first novel for adults, as Maja Lunde was previously a children book writer and a screen writer. For example, in the *Lancashire Evening Post* review, Lunde's professional background is highlighted as a great asset in writing this novel because "she harnesses both her visual storytelling and her empathy with young people to study the complex bonds between parents and their offspring" (September 18, 2017). Kim Ode from *Star Tribune* also touches upon Lunde's earlier literary endeavors, pointing out the fact that "her immersion in a youthful world informs her ability to write with a devastating elegance about the bond — or lack thereof — between parent and child" (August 18, 2017).

Two of the reviewers (*Booklist* and *StarTribune*) associate Lunde's novel with Emily St. John Mandel's apocalyptic novel *Station Eleven* (2014) that incorporates three time frames, before, during, and after a devastating flu-pandemic. Alexander Moran likens the structure of the novel to Ali Smith's *How to Be Both* (2014) in which two parallel narratives effectively intertwine.

Since there is a two-year difference between the release of the novel in Norway (2015) and its English translation (2017), the Anglophone reviewers had the chance to highlight the success of the book in its home country or other European countries. However, only three of the fourteen reviews stress that the novel won the 2015 Norwegian Bookseller's award, namely those from *Los Angeles Times*, *National Post* and *Lancashire Evening Post*. The reviewers from *Los Angeles Times* and *Stuff* mention that the novel was a bestseller in Norway and Germany and that the rights were sold to numerous other countries (2017).

The bees-as-humans metaphor is frequently highlighted in the reviews. Thane Tierney points out Lunde's poignant way of conveying this message in the publication *Bookpage* review:

And while it might be putting too fine a point on it, Lunde demonstrates how our social order mirrors that of the bees: Some of us are workers, some drones and a lucky few queens, but each contributes to the upkeep of the hive in ways we may never understand. (August 22, 2017)

As human society works like a beehive, the collective well-being should prevail over the individual: “The book does, however, leave open the possibility of a way of life that values the collective over the individual, as bees do from the day they are born to the day they die” (*The Atlantic*, September 14, 2017). Kirsten Schuhmacher also writes about the relationship between bees and humans: “It also contends that there is a commonality between bees and humans that far exceeds the organismal. Their pain is our pain. Their loss is reflected in us” (*The Goose*, August 2018).

Mixed and negative comments

Of the fourteen reviews, the only overtly negative one was written by Cameron Woodhead from the Australian newspaper *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Woodhead concludes the review with a negative estimation: “Here the subject feels overworked, in an earnest but ultimately predictable novel” (September 22, 2017). Ellie Robins from the *Los Angeles Times* makes a similar remark, writing that the novel has a “deftly managed if somewhat predictable story”, but she tones it down by acknowledging that “it’s precisely the novel’s pedestrian qualities that have made it such a winner” (September 21, 2017). Tori Latham makes a mixed comment about the subject of the novel: “At times, the moralizing about the environment and humans’ role in global warming can come across a bit heavy-handedly” (*The Atlantic*, September 17, 2017). The idea that the novel’s theme feels slightly forced and easily noticeable could also be found in Catherine Woulfe’s comment from *The New Zealand Listener* review: “Yes, it’s a bit sticky-sweet in places, and the humans-as-bees metaphor that provides the struts for the story is at times less than subtle” (September 17, 2017).

The reviewer from the Australian weekly newspaper *The Saturday Paper* writes in a mixed comment: “The characterisation is at times heavy handed and the prose (in translation) occasionally flawed, but Lunde shows skill in drawing together the three narratives by the novel’s end” (August 31, 2017).

The review from *Bookpage* includes a mixed comment about the novel's structure: "At the outset, the connections between the three are opaque, but Lunde's compelling narrative draws the reader" (August 2017). The reviewer from *The Goose* pinpoints that the description "became somewhat of a distraction" (August 15, 2018).

The translation aspect is barely mentioned. David Herkt from the New Zealand news media website *Stuff* criticizes the translation: "At times the translation falls flat. It is hard to deal with the word "diapers" in the context of 19th-century British life" (October 8, 2017). By contrast, the translation is praised in the *Lancashire Post* review: "this flawless translation is set to seduce the English-speaking world" (September 18, 2017).

Conclusion

The overall reception of the novel is positive. The reviewers praise the ecological message of the novel, describing it as "well-researched" and "thought-provoking". The negative comments do not follow a common thread, but they refer to the lack of subtlety in conveying the message.

2.3 The Romanian reception

In order to contextualize the Romanian reception part, I will briefly present the state of translated contemporary Norwegian literature in Romania. Most of the translation work of Norwegian books is linked to the Department of Scandinavian Languages and Literatures of the Faculty of Letters in Cluj-Napoca, which plays a central role for the promotion of Norwegian literature in Romania. Since the 1990's, this institution provided Norwegian language and literature courses under the guidance of professor and translator Sanda Tomescu Baciu, who was awarded the Royal Norwegian Order of Merit in rank of Knight, class I in 2003. In an article written by Margit Walsø, director of NORLA, she praises the consistent work of the department, highlighting the importance of skilful and devoted translators in the dissemination of Norwegian literature (2016, 13).

Maja Lunde is part of a greater wave of Norwegian literature that has become visible in Romania during the last decade. Contemporary writers such Karl Ove Knausgård, Jon Fosse or Lars Saabye Christensen had their works translated from Norwegian into Romanian. Nevertheless, an extensive search for Romanian reviews and articles written about any other

major releases of Norwegian fiction books clearly indicates that Lunde's *The History of Bees* received the greatest attention compared to other books in the last decade.

The novel was translated into the Romanian language by Sanda Tomescu Baciu and it was published by Humanitas Fiction in April 2019. The book achieved commercial success in Romania, as it made it to "Top 10 Bestselling Books of 2019" list of the publishing house Humanitas Fiction at number 8 (Hotnews.ro 2019).

The press coverage of the book is mainly represented by promotional articles about its launch. Several national newspapers and news websites wrote about the publication of the book in order to promote it. On April 8, 2020, the Romanian daily newspaper *Adevărul* published the first promotional article about the book, in which it is announced that the international bestseller can be found in bookstores. The book launch took place on April 17, 2019 at the Humanitas bookstore. The magazine *National Geographic Romania* wrote a promotional article in which it is announced that various literary critics and journalists were going to attend the book launch on April 17, 2019 at the Humanitas bookstore in the capital city Bucharest. It is also mentioned that the novel became an international bestseller and an adaptation was on its way (Drăghici, April 16, 2019).

The overall Romanian reception of the novel is positive. Most of the reviews are descriptive, with a rather promotional character. In the review for the literary magazine *Viața Românească* ("The Romanian Life"), Rodica Grigore writes appreciatively about Lunde's novel:

Maja Lunde builds an excellent narrative about three life-stories (of love, loneliness, but also a possible rediscover) that symbolically intertwine in the end, as the author amazingly uses the metaphor of the beehive and the bees' ability to ignore their own interest in name of the common one²³ (February 12, 2020).

She compares the dystopian part of the novel with Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006) and Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). Rodica Grigore, along with most of the other Romanian reviewers, stresses the fact that the novel received international acclaim and enjoyed commercial success. She mentions that the

²³ "Maja Lunde realmente construiește o narațiune excelentă și spune trei povești de viață (de dragoste și de singurătate, dar și de posibilă regăsire) care, în final, se conectează în chip simbolic, autoarea utilizând astfel minunat, și la nivel formal, metafora stupului și a capacității albinelor de a ignora interesul propriu în numele celui comun."

book is published in more than thirty-five countries and that a film adaptation is in the works, which indicates the fact that she researched on the topic before writing her review. Furthermore, she summarizes the main perspectives expressed by the international critics, even engaging in the critical discussion of the book by bringing forth the existing evaluations and commenting them. She argues that the novel being described as “non-fiction” because of the post-apocalyptic view of the world in the third part, which from a scientific point of view can become true, does not do justice to Lunde’s fiction writing qualities, thrown into relief by William and George’s stories. Grigore likens the narrative of the novel to a parable, most likely because of the moralizing environmental message that is aimed at the large public through the emotional and riveting stories. Moreover, she maintains that the novel transcends the genre labels that the critics assigned to it, such as “climate fiction” or “speculative fiction” because of the other themes skillfully displayed: the parent-offspring relationship, the lack of communication between people and the contemporary human condition. (Rodica Grigore in *Viața Românească*, February 12, 2020).

Horia Gârbea writes a positive review in the literary magazine *România literară*. He is the only Romanian reviewer that places Maja Lunde in the context of Norwegian literature as an international phenomenon. He explains that Lunde is the only Norwegian “mainstream” writer whose recent success can be compared to that of other Norwegian crime writers, such as Karin Fossum or Jo Nesbø. He describes the novel as “an ecological dystopia”, reminiscent of Maurice Maeterlinck’s *The Life of the Bee* (1901), but while the Belgian writer examines the intricacies of bees’ life, Lunde’s novel deals with their extinction. He praises Lunde’s avoidance of building heroic or extraordinary figures, thus making the characters more credible. He highlights that all the parts of the book have a slight amount of pathos, aimed at a rather juvenile reader, but they are well-written, as he appreciates the use of details and the dry dialogue (*România Literară*, July 2020).

Similarly to Gârbea, the literary critic Mihai Iovănel begins his review in the online cultural publication *Scena9* with a quote from Maurice Maeterlinck’s renowned work about how humans’ chances of survival after a potential extinction of the bees are close to non-existent (April 8, 2019). He declares that one might have expected the novel to be more light-hearted on the grounds of Lunde’s experience with children’s literature, but he realizes that is not the case with this novel. He writes that its main qualities are the realistic dynamics of the familial

relationships and the non-idealistic manner in which Lunde portrays the characters. He concludes his positive review by underscoring the fact that book, besides his entertaining qualities, helps us imagine a dystopian future of a destroyed ecosystem, but also leaves the door open for hope.

Gelu Diaconu starts his review by expressing his reluctance towards books on whose covers it is written “international bestseller”, that are stridently promoted in the media (*O mie de Semne*, April 24, 2019). Lunde’s novel is, however, an exception. He admits that after reading the book he realized that it was the high-quality content of the book that brought its success and not only an efficient marketing campaign. He appreciates the fact that Lunde did not give away the fact that the three stories will emerge into one at the end. Although the narration’s tone is serious, thought-out and slow, similar to the one of other bestsellers’ he dislikes, he praises the way Lunde separates the three voices and the way the rhythm accelerates in certain parts, as when Tao loses her son and desperately looks for him in a desolated Beijing. He also appreciates Lunde’s ability to authentically depict three different worlds. Gelu Diaconu enumerates the genres “historical fiction”, “dystopia” and “parable” when describing the novel. It is interesting that he is not the only Romanian reviewer that uses the concept of “parable” (a short story with human characters that illustrates moral or spiritual lessons) in relation to the novel, as Rodica Grigore also references it. This aspect could indicate that the moralizing character of the novel regarding the protection of the world’s bee population counts considerably for the reviewers. Diaconu comments about the fact that the theme of the novel, the extinction of the bees as the potential cause of the extinction of homo sapiens, can be regarded as a “politically correct” approach. However, he does not condemn it, as he underscores that the novel sends a warning sign about a serious climate change (*O mie de Semne*, April 24, 2019).

Conclusion

Most of the Romanian reviews acknowledge Lunde’s writing skills and praise her choice of creating common and relatable characters. On the basis of the vital message the novel conveys, the reviewers highly recommend the book to their readership. Another strong common aspect they all highlight is the international success of the book.

2.4 Summary and Implications

The analysis of the professional reviews from the three language areas has shed light on a few patterns in the critical reception of the novel. Before proceeding to present them, it is of utmost importance to stress the temporal distance between the publications of these reviews, which can partly account for the differences in reception. The Norwegian reviews were written irrespective of other critics' influence, thus representing a genuine initial reaction to the novel. Although there are no clear indicators that the English reviewers were influenced by the reception of the novel in its homeland, three of them (*Los Angeles Times*, *The National Post* and *Lancashire Evening Post*) mention that the book won the 2015 Norwegian Bookseller's award. The reviewers from *Los Angeles Times* and *Stuff* also mention the bestseller status of the book in Norway and Germany. These references to the critical and commercial reception of the novel in its home country, and especially in Germany, Europe's largest book market, highlight the novel's symbolic and economic capital acquired in the European market. The consecration process of the novel reached the ultimate level once the English reviewers wrote about it, influencing the reception in a peripheral language market, such as the Romanian one. The impact of the Anglophone reception over the Romanian critics is noticeable in the way they draw on key aspects from the English reviews and mention the novel's international success. The reception of a novel in one language can thus shape its reception in others according to the power relations of the transnational field.

One of the main findings of the analysis is that the Norwegian reviewers focus mainly on the craftsmanship of Maja Lunde's writing, as they deal with a book written in their native language, unlike the English and Romanian reviewers who presumably only have access to the book translation. The overarching pattern that emerged from the English and Romanian reviews is the tendency to emphasize the thematic concerns of the novel. The underlying environmental message conveyed through the three human stories strikes a chord with the reviewers.

Notwithstanding the aspects stressed by the critics, the overall reception of the novel in the selected transnational space is positive. The faultfinding reviews are scarce, lacking altogether in Romania. The negative comments from the English and Norwegian reviews revolve around Lunde's heavy-handed writing. These less than favorable remarks do not

overshadow the overall positive evaluation of the novel and they have to be understood from the perspective of the book review genre that traditionally blends appreciation and criticism.

The reviewers are part of the consecration chain, therefore deciding the fortune of the writer. Whether their evaluations are positive or negative, the mere reviewing of the book can propel the writer into the upper echelons of the literary world. The general positive reception in the aforementioned linguistic territories secured Lunde a great reputation as a writer, which served her in the promotion of the other novels from “the climate quartet”.

3. Analysis

3.1 *The History of Bees* – the journey of a bestseller

In order to present the complete journey to consecration of Lunde's novel, I first need to focus on the initial accumulation of prestige in Norway. After receiving predominantly positive reviews, the novel was expected to ascend in the literary world. The Norwegian Minister of Culture, Thorhild Widvey, handed over the Norwegian Bookseller's Prize to Maja Lunde during the forty-third award ceremony held on November 24, 2015 at the House of Literature in Oslo. This is a prestigious award handed out by the Norwegian Booksellers Association since 1948. At that time, it was called the "Takk for boken" ("Thank you for the book") award. In 1981, its current name "The Norwegian Bookseller's Prize" came into use and the ceremony takes place every year in November. The actual award is a bronze statue by the sculptor Nils Aas with the words "Takk for boken" ("Thank you for the book"). In 2015, the booksellers across Norway voted *The History of the Bees* as their favorite fiction book of the year out of other ten successful Norwegian books that were nominated for this award. Lunde's achievement was widely covered by the Norwegian media. Significant newspapers in the country, such as *VG*, *Adresseavisen*, *Dagbladet*, presented Lunde's acceptance speech: "I am incredibly happy for the booksellers who have voted. The fact that so many have voted means a lot for me, each reader is equally valuable. I really appreciate that the book got its breakthrough with the thematic it has"²⁴ (*Dagbladet*, November 24, 2015). In an interview for the newspaper *Adresseavisen*, Trygve Åslund, the director for fiction of the Norwegian publisher Aschehoug, states that this specific literary award is crucial for any writer because it can truly generate sales (November 24, 2015).

The novel also received a nomination for the award "P2-lytternes romanpris", an award handed by the Norwegian radio station NRK P2, but it lost to Linn Ullmann's *The Troubled* (2015). In 2016, Lunde received the Fabel Award, which recognizes the best Norwegian literary works of fantasy fiction. The award is given out by the association "Fabelprosaens

²⁴ "Jeg er utrolig glad for alle bokhandlerne som har stemt. At så mange har gitt sin stemme betyr veldig mye, hver enkelt leser er like verdifull. Jeg setter utrolig stor pris på at boka har fått gjennomslag med den tematikken den har, sier hun"

venner” (“Fantasy-fiction’s friends”) that aims to promote this genre in Norway. Maja Lunde reacted to this on her personal blog, writing:

Although the *The History of Bees* is about something as scientific as bees, it is also an authentic novel. The “Fantasy-Fiction’s friends” (the association) are readers who know how to appreciate a really good story, and now that they have chosen to give *The History of Bees* this award is a great honor.²⁵ (Maja Lunde, May 26, 2016)

The publication of the book in English was another great step in Lunde’s literary consecration. The journey to the English-speaking countries started at the London Book Fair in April 2015, where the book caught the attention of many publishers. That was also the moment Regina Kammerer, the editor from the btb & Luchterhand, part of Random House Germany, acquired the book as a result of “a proposal and a handful of translated chapters” (Hoch 2017). The novel was published in Germany on March 20, 2017 with the title *Die Geschichte der Bienen*. In an article that appeared in the Norwegian newspaper *VG* in 2016, one year after the book release in Norway, it is announced that *The History of Bees* was sold to the famous US publisher Simon & Schuster (Norli and Hansen, June 18, 2016). Even Råkil, the foreign rights manager from Oslo Literary Agency, told in the interview for *VG* that that was unique for any Norwegian writer and that there were numerous bids proposed by the largest American publishers. Lunde’s novel was going to be published in 2017, not only in the USA, but also in England, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and India. The same article includes a fragment from an email *VG* received from Tara Parsons, the chief editor of Simon & Schuster’s Touchstone Books. In the email, she expresses her excitement about the book, stressing the fact many readers will be able to relate to it because of its themes of nature, humanity and the future of Earth. The novel was translated in English by Diane Oatley and it was published in two editions; the American edition by the publisher Touchstone, and the British edition by Simon & Schuster in 2017.

In September 2017, Maja Lunde travelled to New York to launch the book in the United States. She participated in the Brooklyn Book festival, along with Karl Ove Knausgård

²⁵ “Selv om «Bienes historie» handler om noe så naturvitenskapelig som bier, er den nemlig også en fullblods roman. Fabelprisens venner er lesere som vet å sette pris på en virkelig god historie, og at de nå har valgt å gi «Bienes historie» denne utmerkelsen, er en stor ære.”

and Jostein Gaarder, two other renowned Norwegian authors. That same month, Lunde's novel was included in an article published in the *New York Times*, which is an important milestone in every author's consecration process. The article "Is Climate-Themed Fiction All Too Real?" was published on September 26, 2017.

In the United Kingdom, the novel enjoyed a great marketing campaign upon its release. *The History of Bees* was chosen "the book of the month" by the BBC program "Radio 2 Book Club", which meant an hour-long interview with Maja Lunde. According to Annette Orre, Lunde's agent from Oslo Literary Agency, the invitation from this widely known radio program was unprecedented for a Norwegian writer and that it made the British publisher increase the number of copies from the first printing (*VG*, September 9, 2017). The success of the book in other English-speaking countries, such as Australia, New Zealand or Canada, has not been documented in detail by the Norwegian media. However, Lunde's agent announced for *VG* that the novel had great initial sales and that Lunde was going on a book tour in Australia and New Zealand in the beginning of 2018 (2017).

The first printing of the book in the United Kingdom contained 40.000 copies, which were distributed to the Waterstones book stores in April 2018. In an effective attempt to boost the sales and catch the readers' attention, the Waterstones bookstores exhibited artificial beehives and bees in their front windows. *The History of Bees* reached number three on the Waterstones' bestseller list, becoming the book of the month for the British book retailer (Bjørnskau 2018).

The translation into Romanian of the novel was facilitated by NORLA (Norwegian Literature Abroad), a state-run institution that engages actively in the promotion of Norwegian literature internationally by offering grants for literary and non-literary translations into foreign languages. In addition, they financially support trips of Norwegian authors abroad, promote their books internationally and organize conferences for translators and authors. In the case of this novel, they supported its translation into eighteen languages in total: Icelandic, Hebrew, Albanian, Serbian, Hungarian, Russian, Croatian, Slovakian, French, Lithuanian, Arabic, Italian, Danish, Korean, Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish and Romanian. In a rapport published on NORLA's website in 2018, it is mentioned that the previous year, 2017, was a record year for Norwegian literature. That was the same year the novel *The History of Bees* was published in the two largest book markets worldwide, the German and Anglophone ones. The German

market tops the number of releases of Norwegian literature, while the Denmark and the English market come second and third, respectively. 538 books were translated from Norwegian into forty-four languages. In the same rapport, it is mentioned that Lunde's novel was the most sold book in Germany that year (NORLA 2018).

3.2 The reception and the forces of the literary field

The centre-periphery model advanced by the Dutch sociologist Johan Heilbron can be used in order to study the reception of the book. Since I operate with three different language markets, a clarification about their status in the international literary field is thus necessary here. The English language is considered a global language, occupying a hyper-central position in the world literary field, accounting for more than a half of the book translations globally (Heilbron and Sapiro 2016, 378). German is a central language, but it is far behind English, with a share of 9 % of translation in the world market. Norwegian and Romanian each account for less than 1 % of the translations worldwide, thus occupying peripheral positions in the world literary field (378).

The case study of Maja Lunde's novel demonstrates the importance of significant cultural centers for the consecration of an author who writes in Norwegian, a dominated language, in Pascale Casanova's terms. The translation of a novel into one of the main literary languages is a form of "littérisation", described as a process through which an author from a dominated language obtains a "certificate of literariness" (Casanova 2004, 136). The ultimate goal for a peripheral novel is to transition into the English language market, but in order to achieve this, it usually transitions via "regional fields", represented by central or semi-central languages (van Es and Heilbron 2015, 315). In the case of Maja Lunde's novel, it is the German literary center that first helped the book gain capital in the transnational literary field. The novel's rights were acquired by the German publisher in April 2015, more than one year before the acquisition by the English language publisher Simon & Schuster, in June 2016. There are also six months between the publication of the novel in German (March 2017) and the one in English (September 2017). The importance of the German center is also suggested by the Anglophone critics that mention the success of the novel in the Europe's largest book market.

Notwithstanding the initial power dynamics between them, the German and English centers exert their dominance in the literary field, not only due to the large amount of speakers, but also because of the number of agents that function as intermediaries, such as publishers, critics or translators. The German success of Lunde's novel contributed to its international expansion, as many publishers were convinced that this book would return on investment. The English publication came to strengthen its status and influence the reception of the novel in Romanian.

The literary agent Anette Orre declared in an interview for the newspaper *VG* that by June 24, 2017, the book had occupied the number one spot for five weeks on the German bestseller list, published in the weekly news magazine *Der Spiegel*. During that period, the novel sold approximately 10.000 copies every week. Early in 2018, it was announced that after spending fourteen weeks at number one on the *Der Spiegel's* bestseller's list, *The History of Bees* became the bestselling book of 2017 in Germany (Camilla Norli in *VG*, January 2, 2018). The German book market as a cultural transit space breathed new life into not only the international production, but also the international reception of the novel. The commercial success in the largest European book market made other international publishers contact Lunde's agency in order to negotiate for the translation rights. During the two weeks before the interview with the literary agent on June 24, 2017, the novel was sold to ten languages, including Russian, Japanese, and Chinese. The same interview article includes all the languages the novel was going to be translated into and Romanian is on the list (*VG*, June 24, 2017). In a mobile phone conversation with me on November 25, 2020, Anette Orre, literary agent at Oslo Literary Agency, confirmed that an agreement with the Romanian publisher was reached in the spring of 2017. However, it took almost two years until the novel was published in Romanian, in April 2019. The report about the Norwegian translation grants published in March 2018 by NORLA shows that the grant for the Romanian translation of *The History of Bees* was due in December 2018 (NORLA 2018). After the publication in the central language markets, the German and the English ones, the novel started gaining recognition in the literary world, which eventually influenced the reception of the novel in smaller countries as well, such as Romania. Before the publication of the novel in English, the translation rights were sold to seventeen language markets, i.e. twenty-five countries, including France, Spain and South-

Korea. After the publication and reception of the novel in English and German, the book was translated into thirty-six languages and more than fifty countries (Book365, June 18, 2016).

The international media coverage of the novel impacts the journey of a book to consecration. Reviewers and literary journalists select and evaluate the literary “goods”, deciding which ones will become worthy of their audience’s attention. Press reviews and newspaper articles can shape new patterns of reception for a novel. They can include contextual elements or they can simply omit them, giving birth to various manners in which the audience receives the novel.

The Romanian reviews make reference to the international newspaper articles and reviews, thus engaging in the larger critical discussion. Most of them stress that the novel is an international bestseller and that it is translated into numerous languages. There are two reasons for this. On the one hand, since one of the reviewers’ goals is to encourage readers to buy and read the book, mentioning its bestseller status has the function to reassert its power in order to generate sales. On the other hand, the bestseller label indicates that the book has “the ability to tap a specific cultural nerve and thereby serve as exercises in the management of social anxieties” (Botting 2012, 163). By presenting the book’s accolades, the Romanian reviewers paint the image of an important book that speaks directly to the readers because of its environmental thematic concerns.

The possibility of a film adaptation based on the novel is another aspect highlighted in the Romanian media reception, namely by the newspapers *National Geographic Romania* and the literary magazine *Viața Românească*. Rumors that the novel can possibly get a film adaptation appeared in 2017. In an interview for NRK, at the Frankfurt Book Fair in October 2017, Lunde admits that she received many proposals from foreign producers regarding a potential film adaptation of her novel, but she was yet to make a choice amongst them (Carlsen and Staude 2017). In May 2019, it was announced that Anonymous Content, one of the most important American entertainment companies, optioned *The History of Bees* in order to produce a TV-series based on it, with Lunde as a co-producer (Carlsen and Drabløs 2019).

Johan Heilbron argues that the international recognition of a text from the periphery “will contribute to and may indeed interfere with indigenous reputations” (1999, 437). This phenomenon can be observed in regards with Maja Lunde’s novel: its success caught the attention of the Norwegian press once the novel gained popularity in Germany and the English-

speaking countries. Numerous articles were presenting the commercial milestones achieved by the novel, mentioning the number of copies sold in different countries. In May 2018, in an article from *Dagbladet*, it is announced that her novel became an international success and sold over one million copies worldwide. In 2017, her novel was the bestselling book in Germany, surpassing Ken Follet, Dan Brown and Elena Ferrante (Åkervik 2018). In November 2018, the book was longlisted for the Dublin Literary Award 2019, one of the most prestigious book awards, along with two other Norwegian books: Lars Myttings *The Sixteen Trees of the Somme* (2017), originally published as *Svøm med den som drunker* (2014) and Vigdis Hjorths *A House in Norway* (2017), the English translation of *Et norsk hus* (2014). In the case of this particular award, major libraries across the world nominate English-language novels, either in translation or originally written in English (Bok365, November 18, 2018). In March 2019, the Norwegian online newspaper Bok365 wrote an article about the Norwegian literature's success in the United Kingdom, for which Maja Lunde also contributed. The British public is generally not interested in translations, as they represent circa 3 % of the total books sold in the UK. However, in the recent years it has increased to 5, 63 %. Data from Nielsen Book Scan (March 2019) shows that Norwegian literature has not only succeeded in entering the British market, but also made it to top. Jo Nesbø, Maja Lunde and Lars Mytting are the Norwegian authors whose works have contributed the most to the Norwegian literary export in the United Kingdom. Jo Nesbø's novels *The Thirst* (*Tørst*, 2017) and *Macbeth* (2018) top the list of bestselling books in translation published in the last five years, while Maja Lunde's *The History of Bees* occupies the seventh place, with 44 602 copies sold up until that point (Bok365, March 27, 2019). In an end-of-decade list that honors the ten most important Norwegian books published between 2010 and 2019, NRK Kultur included Maja Lunde's *The History of Bees*. The motivation for this is that the books urges to action and makes people realize the importance of the bees (December 22, 2019).

Lunde's position as a central figure for the contemporary Norwegian literature was symbolically recognized in 2020 with two important prizes. On January 31, 2020, it was announced that Lunde was going to receive the Bjørnson Prize handed out by the Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson Academy. The institution bears the name of the Norwegian Nobel Prize Winner for literature, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson. The aim of the Academy is to promote literature and knowledge about literary and cultural forms of expression outside the Norwegian cultural

circle, as well as the freedom of expression in the spirit of Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson. The awarding ceremony took place during the opening of the Norwegian Festival of Literature on May 26, 2020. Lunde was rewarded for her literary career and her commitment for human condition and dignity that has attained an international dimension with her “climate quartet” (Bok365, January 31, 2020).

Maja Lunde also received the Peer Gynt Prize, handed out by the company Peer Gynt AS, which organizes the Peer Gynt Festival every year. The award is named after the famous play *Peer Gynt* (1867) by the renowned Norwegian writer Henrik Ibsen. The prize is intended to reward a person or an institution that has brought a great contribution to society and made Norway known internationally. In an article in the newspaper *VG*, Lunde expresses her surprise as well as gratitude for this achievement, especially since the members of the committee are parliamentary representatives. She was awarded for putting Norway on the map for her international literary success (Norli 2020).

The book continued to illustrate its cultural capital in Norway in other art forms. The musical *The History of Bees*, a collaboration between The Norwegian National Ballet and The Norwegian Theatre, premiered on September 11, 2020. Dramatized by Ingrid Weme Nilsen and directed by Erik Ulfby, the play was well-received in the Norwegian press (Mynewsdesk 2020).

By focusing on the journey through the international literary space of *The History of Bees*, a widely translated book, I have analyzed the power relations that shape its production and reception. I demonstrated how the book’s transition through the cultural centers of Germany and the English-speaking countries gave it a considerable power in the international literary field, even conquering peripheral territories.

3.3 Literary prestige and the genre

Besides the transnational flow of the book translation, the accumulation of literary prestige depends on the genre label it carries. In the case of Maja Lunde’s novel reception, the genre aspect has been a common thread that necessitates a closer examination. Numerous English reviews and articles either name Lunde’s novel in relation to climate fiction or they call her novel climate fiction. However, in several interviews, she distances herself from this label. In an interview for *Dagbladet*, it is mentioned that Lunde has been perceived as a “cli-fi writer” in

the Anglophone world. She responds by stating that her books cannot be pigeonholed, as they can be read as human stories and not exclusively from the climate change perspective (May 26, 2018). Lunde does not identify with this genre, but the reviewers and journalists still attach it to her work. Therefore, a discussion surrounding the potential hierarchy of genres can shed light on the position of the novel within the wider literary system.

In the article “The fear for climate change is reflected in culture”²⁶ published in the Norwegian online newspaper *forskning.no*, Maja Lunde is described as one of the most important writers of the so-called “climate literature”. In her famous novel *The History of Bees*, she draws parallels between past, present and future, after the fashion of science fiction writers (Lilleslåten 2020). In the same article, Sissel Furusest, Nordic literature professor and member of the Oslo School of Environmental Humanities, argues that the science fiction genre has been poorly treated by literature researchers, but because of the nowadays climate crisis, it has recently received scholarly attention. Although I do not seek to expand on the history and particularities of sci-fi, its association with Maja Lunde’s novel requires an explanation about the genre’s perceived status that could allow for a better understanding of the way contemporary critics use the term “cli-fi” in relation to her novel. While a straightforward definition of the science fiction genre would not capture its multi-faceted nature, it is safe to affirm that such works depict alternate realities based on advanced science and technology (24). In their book *Science Fiction and Climate Change: A Sociological Approach* (2020), the literary researchers Andrew Milner and J.R. Burgmann argue that climate fiction is a sub-genre of sci-fi because of its preoccupation with climate science (25, 26). With this aspect in mind, science fiction and its sub-genre, climate fiction, fall into the category of “genre fiction”. This is an umbrella term that designates texts that can be clearly classified into specific genres, such as romance, thrillers or crime fiction (Trexler and Johns-Putra 2011, 188). This type of literature is also known as “popular literature” and it is aimed at the mass market. These books are characterized, in broad strokes, by formulaic plots and an emphasis on the story rather than the artistic language (Verboord 2011, 446). In contrast to genre fiction, literary fiction tends to be highly regarded due to “particular kinds of formal innovation, the ‘seriousness’ of their work, their interest in character and human interaction” (Trexler and Johns-Putra 2011, 189).

²⁶ “Frykten for klimaendringer speiles i kulturen”

Literary critics have operated with this distinction between literary and genre fiction, usually excluding the latter altogether. They predominantly pay attention to works of literary fiction, thus endowing them with artistic legitimacy. Consequently, these works tend to receive literary prizes and recognition in the academia, thus gaining symbolic capital on the field of cultural production (Sapiro 2010, 426). However, it is important to mention that this division “literary” versus “genre” fiction is quite simplistic because texts acquire their designation not only on the grounds of their characteristics, but also because of the “identification of its author with the genre and the willingness of readers to read that text and its author within those generic boundaries” (Trexler and Johns-Putra 2011, 187). Margaret Atwood, for example, is reluctant to the label of science fiction attached to her work, which she considers to be “literary” rather than ‘genre’ fiction (Milner and Burgmann 2020, 26). Similarly, Maja Lunde avoids attaching the “cli-fi” label to her work. One of the main drawbacks of this label is that it “may bear a reductive connotation” because of its linguistic similarity to the term “sci-fi” (Mehnert 2016, 41). Nevertheless, Trexler and Johns-Putra highlight that cli-fi, although categorized as genre fiction, has garnered critical attention because it can as well serve as a source of literary innovation (189). In the case of *The History of Bees*, the English-speaking literary critics and journalists have reviewed and discussed the novel within the framework of climate fiction to some extent. In order to get an impression of their perspective towards “cli-fi” and the extent to which they discuss it in relation to the novel, I will analyze the comments about genre in the Norwegian and the English media coverage.

The Norwegian book reviews that the novel received upon its publication in August 2015 do not include the words “climate change” or “climate fiction”. This could be explained partly by the fact that, at that time, Lunde was only at her first book from the climate quartet, thus she did not have the reputation of an environmental adult fiction writer. In addition, the term “cli-fi” was yet to reach its peak popularity in Norway. In fact, a Google search by custom date range for the year of 2015 shows that the first Norwegian article that contained the term was published in September 2015 and it was written by Kjetil Johansen in the monthly magazine *Aftenposten Innsikt*. In the article “Cli-fi – time of climate stories”²⁷, he dedicates the introductory paragraph to Lunde’s novel as an example of this new wave of literature

²⁷ “Kli-fi – Klimafortellingenes tid”

(September 8, 2015). It could thus be implied that Lunde's work inaugurated the discussion about climate fiction in her home country.

Although the Norwegian book reviews do not include the specific term “cli-fi”, there is considerable involvement with the environmental issue in them. There are five reviews that introduce the real-life phenomenon Colony Collapse Disorder: *Aftenposten*, *Dagsavisen*, *Adresseavisen*, *Litkritikk.no* and *Fædrelandsvennen*. Maria Årolilja Rø writes in *Adresseavisen* about the relevance of the book's underlying message for its readers: “Now, in connection with the mysterious plague that has exterminated many bees, it has become clear how vulnerable we humans are to even the smallest changes in nature's cycle”²⁸ (August 10, 2015). The *Klassekampen* review includes a commentary about the environmentally-oriented message of the novel: “The futuristic story from 2098 is the Chinese box; it contains the previous stories. Here, books and knowledge from the past emerge and substantiate the in-built ethics of the book: not to exploit the resources, but preserve them”²⁹ (August 15, 2015). The *Fædrelandsvennen* reviewer describes the third part as an “authentic sci-fi thriller”³⁰, in which the world is deprived of the bees' pollination, and therefore human society lies in ruins (August 25, 2015).

The most frequent genre denomination associated with the novel, particularly the story about Chinese Tao, is “future dystopia”. Erika Fatland comments upon the fact that “future dystopias” are more common amongst young adult book writers than adult book writers. She also mentions that Maja Lunde is not a novice in this field, as she is a children and young adult book writer. Gerd Elin Stava Sandve from *Dagsavisen* writes: “*The History of Bees* is an historical novel, contemporary story and future dystopia in one”³¹ (August 6, 2015). Maria Kleve from *Dagbladet* compares the story about Tao with the environmental dystopias of the recent years:

We are in China in 2098, where the trees need hand pollination to bear fruits. This means long and hard working days for the most inhabitants, already from the age of

²⁸ “Nå, i forbindelse med den mystiske pesten som har utryddet mange bier, har det blitt klart hvor sårbare vi mennesker er for selv de minste endringer i naturens kretsløp.”

²⁹ “Framtidshistorien fra 2098 er den kinesiske esken; den rommer de tidlige historiene. Her dukker bøker og kunnskap fra fortiden opp, og underbygger bokas innebygde etiske: Ikke å drive rovdrift på ressursene, men ta vare på dem.”

³⁰ “en ekte sci-fi-thriller”

³¹ “Bienes historie er en historisk roman, samtidsfortelling og framtidsdystopi i ett”

eight-years old. This part of the book reminds of the many environmental dystopias, pessimistic future descriptions that have come the recent years.³² (August 1, 2015)

Notwithstanding the reviewers' comments about the book's affinity with science fiction, Maja Lunde made it clear in several interviews given upon the novel's publication that her intention was not to write within the framework of the aforementioned genre. When asked if her novel is a dystopia, she rejects the label and explains that that the reasoning behind this book was to conjure up an image of the world without bees (*Aftenposten*, August 7, 2015). In another article, she underlines that her novel is neither science fiction nor dystopia: "I have written a story that takes place in the future, without necessarily placing the novel within those genres"³³ (Bok365, January 2, 2016). As previously discussed, it is notable that at the time of the publication of the novel in its original language, neither Maja Lunde nor the Norwegian media use the term "climate fiction" in relation to it, as the other well-established denominations such as science fiction or dystopia are more preferred.

The term "climate fiction" became more frequent in the Anglophone media coverage of *The History of Bees*. The professional reviews that include the term are the ones written in the newspapers *The Atlantic* (United States) and *The Saturday Paper* (Australia). It is important to mention that these reviews were written in 2017, when the concept of "cli-fi" was already established in the vocabulary of numerous literary critics. The United States also occupies a central role for the "cli-fi", with a prolific literary production of this type. Ellie Robins uses the phrase "climate change" four times in the *Los Angeles Times* review, including it even in its opening line: "'Our children and grandchildren' is a phrase often wheeled out in conversations about climate change" (*Los Angeles Times*, September 21, 2017). Robins puts forward the concept of "first impact fiction" to describe the second narrative of the novel, which presents the American beekeeper George in the year of 2007. The concept of "first impact fiction" was introduced by the novelist Ashley Shelby (2017) and it refers to "fiction set in more or less the present day, which depicts 'our shared world as the impacts of runaway climate change begin

³² "Vi er i Kina i 2098, der trærne må håndpollineres for å bære frukter. Det betyr lange og harde arbeidsdager for de fleste innbyggerne, allerede fra åtteårsalderen. Denne delen av boka minner om de mange miljø-dystopiene, altså dystre framtidsskildringer, som har kommet de siste åra."

³³ "Jeg har skrevet en historie som utspiller seg i fremtiden, uten at det nødvendigvis plasserer romanen innenfor disse sjangerne."

to make themselves known” (September 21, 2017). Tori Latham from the American magazine *The Atlantic* categorizes the novel as climate fiction, as the subtitle of the article shows: “Maja Lunde’s climate fiction debut uses species extinction to ask its human characters: “What’s more important, self-interest or sacrifice?” (September 14, 2017). In the introduction of her review, Latham offers examples of climate fiction, a category of literature that has expanded in the recent years and in which Lunde’s novel neatly fits (2017). Kim Ode from the US newspaper *Star Tribune* does not mention climate change but acknowledges Lunde’s potential to write about “the consequences that may lie in our future”, mentioning that *The History of Bees* is “the first in a ‘climate quartet’ of novels” (August 18, 2017). The anonymous Australian reviewer from *The Saturday Paper* treats Lunde’s novel as “cli-fi” throughout the entire review, which he starts by concisely presenting the implications of this genre’s expansion:

Cli-fi – climate fiction – has become so popular it has achieved the status of the genre. That makes it more easily identifiable and more marketable, but it also comes with pitfalls. Conventions carry the risk of appearing formulaic and repetitive. They also emphasise a genre’s status as fiction. This is all a problem for cli-fi, given that its practitioners are concerned with raising awareness about very real and urgent issues. (August 31, 2017)

In spite of the above-mentioned challenges that writing in this new genre can pose, the Australian reviewer is predominantly appreciative of Lunde’s “cli-fi” novel. It is argued that the third story, set in China, known for its one-child policy, captures the quintessential idea that “in order to live in nature, with nature, we must detach ourselves from the nature in ourselves”(August 31, 2017). It is therefore this third part of the novel that bears witness to the cli-fi’s impact potential, according to *The Saturday Paper* reviewer.

Robert J. Wiersema from the Canadian newspaper *The National Post* labels the novel as speculative fiction, directly in the title of the review: “Maja Lunde makes colony collapse disorder the background for speculative fiction” (August 28, 2017). Another reviewer that puts forward the concept of speculative fiction is Catherine Woulfe from the weekly magazine *The New Zealand Listener*: “Pesticides kill the bees. Crops die. We die. Speculative fiction? Even for the genre, the first novel by Norwegian Maja Lunde feels uncomfortably close to non-fiction that hasn’t quite happened yet” (September 19, 2017). The fact that reviewers use this

term to describe the entire novel is a clear indicator that the last narrative, set in 2098 in a dystopian China, has the dramatizing effect that engages them in the story.

The novel is also discussed in relation to agricultural practices. The review from the English newspaper *Lancashire Post* describes the novel as “a unique and thought-provoking story about the dangers of modern farming practices and the use of toxic pesticides” (September 18, 2017). In the same vein, Kirsten Schuhmacher writes in the Canadian literary magazine *The Goose* that “the novel simply calls attention to the serious implications of agricultural management” (August 15, 2018).

It is not only the reviews that treat the novel as climate fiction. Numerous press articles present the novel as climate fiction. In an article in the international daily newspaper *Financial Times* (September 22, 2017), Nilanjana Roy includes quotes from Lunde’s novel to exemplify the way writers depict the changes in climate and environment. In the context of this discussion about genre, it is interesting to note that Maja Lunde appears as a search result in the Encyclopedia of Science Fiction:

She is of interest for the Klimakvartetten [Climate Quartet] series beginning with *Bienes historie* (2015; trans Diane Oatley as *The History of Bees* 2017) and *Blå* ["Blue"] (2017; trans Diane Oatley as *The End of the Ocean* 2019), which focuses intensely on Ecological cruces, like the ongoing extermination of bees and its consequences, or the radical impoverishment of the oceans of the world, with the overall crisis of Climate Change framing the enterprise. An ongoing thrust towards possible solutions is warm-hearted. (Clute 2020)

In 2020, the British critic Boyd Tonkin wrote the article “The Buzz about Maja Lunde and Norwegian Cli-Fi”, which was published on the website Norwegian Arts, run by the Royal Norwegian Embassy in London. As the title shows, he categorizes Lunde’s works as cli-fi, highlighting that: “In Norway, as elsewhere, speculative fiction about climate change and its consequences (“cli-fi”, as critics have dubbed it) has ceased to be a marginal genre of interest to activists alone” (August 24, 2020). *The History of Bees* was included in an article with the title “Is Climate-Themed Fiction All Too Real? We Asked the Experts” in the American newspaper *The New York Times*. Climate change experts were asked to assess the likelihood of the scenarios depicted by various climate novels. In the case of Maja Lunde’s novel, the extinction of bees actually does have a scientific basis:

While Colony Collapse Disorder — previously believed to pose a major threat to all bees — has declined substantially in recent years, Dr. Kerr said it was conceivable that five or six “keystone” species, which pollinate crops like canola, tomatoes, blueberries and strawberries, could be lost, in part because of global warming. (Livia Albeck-Ripka, September 26, 2017)

In all the interviews about this book, Maja Lunde admits that climate change has always been one of her major concerns. In an interview from the book launch in New York for the Norwegian newspaper *Dagbladet*, she states that while researching this topic, she started worrying about the future of the world her children will grow up in (September 17, 2017). During her international visits, the discussion about her books inevitably led to the real challenge that the world is facing. In an article for *NRK*, she states that in her promotional tours for her first two novels, journalists and readers always asked her about Norway’s contribution to the mitigation of the climate issue. She confesses that her response was rather hesitant, as she metaphorically wishes that Norway would switch the black “leader jersey” with a green one (“den grønne ledertrøya”), alluding to the oil exploitation in her home country that should be replaced with more environmentally-friendly resources (October 28, 2018). However, Maja Lunde does not actively promote her books as climate fiction. In the interview from the book launch in the United States for *Dagbladet*, it is mentioned that the American publisher calls her novel “eco-fiction”, but she would rather describe it as a climate novel about the bees’ extinction and its effects (September 17, 2017). In another interview for the British book retailer Waterstones, referring to the fact that her novels have been categorized as “cli-fi”, Maja Lunde seems to distance herself from this denomination, stressing that she drew inspiration from her life:

Someone has called my novels “cli-fi”. I think of them only as novels. I told myself I didn’t want to write about my own life, but looking back at the two published books, I do see a lot of my life in them. I write about parents and children, about love between partners, about losing someone you love. The books can be read as relationship stories, as stories about the value of knowledge, about class, equality, conflict, love. (Lunde April 13, 2018)

Despite Lunde’s reluctance towards the genre, she has become the forefront of Norwegian fiction about climate change, drawing attention to crucial environmental issues in her literary texts that have enjoyed both popularity and critical appreciation.

4. Conclusion

In this master thesis, I have examined the reception of the international bestseller *The History of Bees* by Maja Lunde in three different global areas: Norway, Romania and the English-speaking countries. By reconstructing the transnational journey of the book, I have identified and discussed the various factors that shaped the reception of the book translation, using the theoretical framework developed in the works of Pierre Bourdieu and Pascale Casanova. This study has provided insight into the literary phenomenon of a bestseller with a strong societal message that transformed Maja Lunde, a children's and young adult fiction author, mostly known in Norway, into a high-profile literary figure who received plaudits from critics across the world.

I have first focused on the critical reception in order to have an overview over the reviewers' evaluations. The study of the professional reviews has not yielded categorical answers, yet there a few patterns that have emerged. The Norwegian reviews were more focused on language and style, whereas the English and the Romanian reviews majorly focused on the theme and the message of the novel. The review analysis has also demonstrated the overall positive reception of the novel, which functioned as a catalyst for its ascension in the literary field.

The core-periphery model developed by Johan Heilbron has helped me understand the dynamic relations that shaped the flow of the book translation in the transnational literary field characterized by unequal power poles. I have thus followed how a novel written in a peripheral language (Norwegian) makes its way to the core of the world literary field, achieving literary recognition and a remarkable commercial performance, and eventually impacting other peripheral markets. The cultural centers of Germany and the English-speaking countries have turned out to be essential for the consecration of the book. The analysis has demonstrated that it was transition into the regional German center that marked the beginning of capital accumulation in the transnational literary field, securing the novel a smooth transition into the hyper-central English language market. Eventually, the Anglophone reception influenced the Romanian reviewers who draw on key aspects of the English media coverage of the novel. *The History of Bees* accumulated literary prestige overseas, which solidified the novel's position in Norway and fuelled Lunde's popularity. This is mainly demonstrated by the numerous

Norwegian awards she received and by the production of the theater play based on the novel that was staged in Norway five years after the initial publication, in 2020.

Another essential part of the novel's reception I have discussed is the genre aspect and the label "climate fiction" in particular. Few of the Anglophone professional reviewers include "cli-fi" in their critique, but a great deal of the press articles and other forms of media coverage about the novel give away the fact that the afterlife of the novel is strongly understood from the perspective of this relatively newly-found genre. As the climate threat has become an essential topic of the public debate, climate fiction has grown into a noteworthy genre of contemporary literature, virtually escaping the confines of its linguistic similarity with science fiction, which has traditionally been overlooked by literary scholars.

This reception study contributes to the as-yet limited body of research dedicated to how international audiences receive literature concerned with climate change. By using the framework of sociology of literature, it also sheds light on the broader context in which a book translation traverses the transnational literary field. However, my approach has its limitations, and therefore does not provide answers to all the questions that can be raised about the reception of this novel. One of the topics that could produce significant insight revolves around the differences between the numerous amateur reviewers posted online and the professional reviewers that I have analyzed in this paper. A quantitative analysis of the amateur reviews would possibly yield interesting information about the readers' motivation to buy or read this book, as well as their genuine reactions to reading it. Another territory left unsearched is how the reviewers compare the first novel of the quartet with the other two, *The End of the Ocean* and *Przewalski's Horse*. It is likely that in the light of the other two books, the reviewers may perceive *The History of Bees* from a different angle, potentially conjuring up the greater picture of the "climate quartet".

In a world confronted by climate change, the power of storytelling contributes to processing the anxieties of climate change. With its compelling stories about the fascinating insects, the bees, this novel managed to reach out to a wide readership around the world, getting the best of both worlds: critical appraisal and commercial success.

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