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READING GUIDE

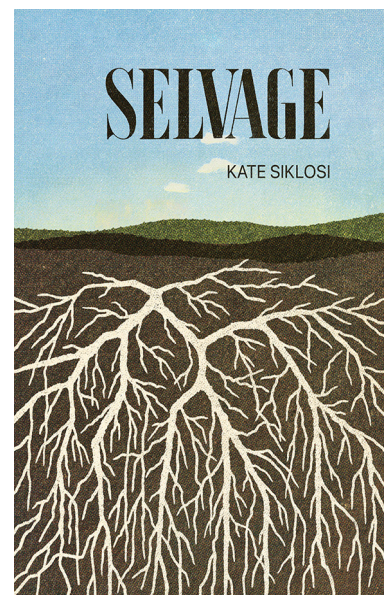
Kate Siklosi's *Selvage*

Dear reader,

This book took me many years to write, and if I'm being quite honest, it was an arduous journey from start to finish. Reckoning with intergenerational family trauma is never an easy thing to do; it is a life's work. However, poetry, and in particular experimental poetry—where fragments can come together in collage to create new, unexpected stories—can be a mode of healing. My hope is that this book invites you in, creates conversations, asks some difficult questions about ourselves and the world around us, and sparks wonder.

In particular, one of the central preoccupations of the book is how art, and specifically poetry, can be a tool for coming to terms with our pasts, for wrangling with our fragmented memories. Growing up, my family always had a veil of mystery surrounding how we came to be: the scant facts about my grandparents and how they came to live in Canada after escaping Hungary under the Iron Curtain in 1956; my nagymama (grandmother) dying in childbirth and my dad and his siblings being taken from their father because he was deemed unfit to raise them; my nagypapa's (grandfather's) grief at finding himself alone without his family in this new country, lacking the resources and knowledge of the language to defend himself and his family, and subsequently taking out his grief by setting fire to the Children's Aid building and then dying in jail; the mysterious "neighbour" who I later learned was my dad's oldest sibling who sexually abused my brother and my cousins; my uncle taking his own life. These stories are fragmentary, incomplete, yet complete and part of my family's truth; whether for lack of records, lack of knowledge, or trauma-induced forgetting, we don't have all the facts. Yet together, they form the selvage—or unfinished seams—of my personal existence.

It is against this fractured familial backdrop that I made the decision to have a child, which was a decision I did not come to lightly, largely because of the fear of repeating the cycles of trauma and violence I witnessed and endured as a child and that still shape my relationships to love, care, and intimacy. I also struggle with the narrative of women (or people, writ large) needing children to become whole or completely self-actualized; yet I also knew that if I didn't try to have a child I would likely come to regret it, but also that if it weren't possible, or didn't happen, I would live a perfectly happy and fulfilling life. In that, there's a deep ambivalence that I don't think is talked about enough. How can we talk more openly about parenthood in an age of scarcity, climate crisis, and political upheaval? How might we resist the rampant social narrative of parenthood as a singular evolutionary telos, and talk more openly about parenthood and ambivalence? We hear stories about people not wanting to have kids, and stories about people who are steadfast in their desire to have children and will go to great ends to do so. But rarely do we hear stories in literature or media about people who are wildly ambivalent and then one day decide, over a dinner of nachos and beer on a hot summer evening outside a rundown local bar in the midst of a global pandemic, to make the decision to try—'cause why not.



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Burgeoning parenthood is the perfect time to contemplate how we came to be—as people, as individuals, as citizens of the world. And so the second section of *Selvage* plunders language from the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms to interrogate patriarchal, colonial, and legal scripts of being and personhood. While reading though the Charter, I was struck by the fact that for a document that presumes to protect human rights, there's actually very little “human” in the language; so, in line with the work of M. NourbeSe Philip, Tracy K. Smith, and others, I set out to plunder the inhuman rhetoric and language of this nation-state text and put it in conversation with the discourse of trees talking to one another through mycelial networks to explore how we might forge new creative, empathetic, and human connections between ourselves, our communities, and the land we call home.

Selvage is also ecological in nature: organic elements are brought in thematically and literally on the page, but also in the collage of its whole, where, in line with Robert Duncan's work, seemingly disparate elements come together in community, in creative partnerships of multiplicity and interchange. In this way, the book interrogates how we might be able to think more critically about our role in the environment and how our stories and that of the leaves, trees, and plants around us are so intricately intertwined. For me, this mode of experimental writing—of bringing together many discourses, ideas, objects, feelings, and thoughts together in collage, each existing as individual fragments but coming together in an interactive whole—can be extremely cathartic. Most of our lives are such collages made up of the edges, cuts, seams, and sutures of our existence; experimental poetry offers one way of reckoning with these fragments, of bringing them into focus not toward the end of meaning or sense, per se, but toward an understanding that we contain and are made from multitudes.

So, as you might have gleaned, there's a lot going on in this book. It takes the form of a collage, not only in terms of subject matter but also form: I have, for quite some time, been preoccupied with visual poetry, and in particular, handcrafted sculptural pieces using organic detritus like leaves, husks, and sticks that I find most often while walking my dog (she's a Saint Bernard, thanks for asking). The visual pieces in this book were created by writing on various natural objects using Letraset, which is a vintage dry transfer lettering medium that was used in proto graphic design. Working with these materials requires a high level of attention and patience, as they are incredibly fragile and prone to breakage (not to mention the fragility of Letraset itself, which almost never produces the desired outcome in its application). When I work with these materials, I am very much a humble co-author yielding to the poem that arises. In this way, the book stands out against our super saturated, technomediatic world and asks, how might a poetic of radical care (both in terms of carefulness or even tedium with objects, materials, thoughts, ideas, and also care for the other, for community, for ourselves) be transformative in a world that encourages and rewards hardness, competition, productivity at all costs?

Selvage, as the title suggests, reckons with the unfinished seams of our existence and how those messy ends are also new beginnings. But perhaps above all else, this book is about love—love that spans many lands, stories, pasts, wounds—that weathered, gritty, deeply rooted, regenerative love that carries from generation to generation.

Thanks for reading—I hope you enjoy *Selvage*!

—Kate Siklosi

