

The Baby Book

Robin Silbergleid

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REVIEWED BY DORSIA SMITH SILVA

In *The Baby Book*, Robin Silbergleid explores her long journey to motherhood in poetry. With rich candor, Silbergleid intimately reveals her battles with infertility, assisted reproductive technology, multiple miscarriages, high-risk pregnancies, and eventual birth of her two children. Her moving and powerful determination to conceive is adeptly highlighted throughout the text's five sections.

In the first section, Silbergleid initiates her path to motherhood. The first poem, "I Will Name My Daughter Hannah," reflects upon the narrator's intense desire to become a mother as she starts "carrying a needle / and a spool of pink thread, ready to sew buttons on tiny sweaters / or mend holes in cotton socks, just in case." The following poems further illustrate her maternal yearning as she reads books about childbirth, dreams of baby names, and drinks fertility concoctions. Silbergleid then brings the reader to the narrator's struggle with infertility, particularly in "The Fertility Patient" when she accentuates how fertility patients are viewed by doctors as simple medical codes on insurance forms. By the end of this section, the poems become even more gripping when the narrator describes the beginning of her miscarriage in "I Draw My Doctor a Picture" and laments the repeated cycle of fertility treatments in "After the Miscarriage, My Doctor Speaks."

The second section continues the intense exploration of the narrator's several miscarriages. In "Miscarriage (3)," the readers experience the narrator's deep pain of loss, especially when Silbergleid writes "and the baby who won't be / sits heavy in my pelvis / the placenta that tried so hard still / pumping blood to his stumped cells." Silbergleid also links the loss of the fetus to the miscarriage suffered by Frida Kahlo, as the narrator believes that they are connected spirits of women that mourn their unborn children. Silbergleid mentions Kahlo again in "An Open Letter to Frida Kahlo" when the narrator recovers from a medical procedure after she miscarries and envisions Kahlo painting her hospital room. Yet, even with this bond to Kahlo, the narrator knows that the agony of miscarriage cannot be assuaged: "there is no syntax / for loss" in the concluding poem, "My Doctor Writes Me a Poem."

The narrator's journey finally reaches fruition in the third section when the narrator gives birth to her daughter, Hannah. In "Amniotic," the narrator recalls the strong formation of the mother-dyad: "*Mama*, she says— / in an

instant one becomes two / becomes one again, our bodies / severed in the birth room.” She also reminisces about how quickly her daughter has grown in “First Day of Preschool”: “*You still my baby?*” Hannah says, echoing / what I have told her for days.” However, Silbergleid reminds the reader of additional miscarriages and fertility treatments when the narrator tries to have another child in the fourth section. The emotional turmoil is sharply heartfelt when Silbergleid writes, “Yesterday / my doctor scrawled *recurrent pregnancy loss*, / sent me for a blood draw. This / is what I carry with me” in “My Daughter Asks for a Baby Sister from the Tooth Fairy.”

By the fifth section, Silbergleid has completely engaged the readers with her realistic depictions of suffering multiple miscarriages and enduring several fertility treatments. Instead of a traditional baby book, readers are drawn into the narrator’s world of endless expensive IVF cycles in “In Lieu of a Baby Book” and “Lexicon.” Silbergleid reveals that the arduous journey has been worth it when she writes that the narrator’s son is three weeks old in the concluding poem, “Coda: Dear Doctor.” Yet, the narrator warns that the difficult fertility experiences may reoccur, since she has “leftover embryos” and wonders if she should “use, donate, [or] destroy” them. Silbergleid does not provide any easy answers to this situation. Instead, she encourages readers to reflect upon our own challenges to the journey of motherhood and welcome this profound conversation.