REVIEW

Le livre de Sève, by Charlotte Monsarrat

by Nicolas Becard

October 5, 2026 · On *Le livre de Sève*

Both a human dystopia and an ecological fable, Le livre de Sève follows the epic journey of Sève, born in the heart of the Ronciers. A singular, intelligent novel.



The Root came from the sky, and from the Root sprang the Bramble Thickets, giant Thickets, strong, so strong that humans are residual and civilization a memory.

Charlotte Monsarrat's new novel opens in the heart of one of these Thickets.

> *"In the Thicket, women are born and give birth."*

They are all called the Mothers, without distinction; dreams and words have disappeared, and they are nothing but wombs, fertilized and delivered on an assembly line. A whiff of factory farming, perhaps? And the men? Oh, don't worry, nature believes in parity.

The Mother who concerns us sometimes hears cries from outside the plant prison, and she clings to one of the words she hears. When her daughter is born, she makes that word her name: Duramen. Blessed with a name, Duramen begins to think; the worm is in the apple. After giving birth to three newborn males, quickly removed by the Thicket, the Mother brings another little girl into the world. She will be called Sève (Sap), and it is her epic we are about to discover.

Nourished by the words her older sister has collected, Sève is endowed with both male and female genitalia, a hybrid with the look of a flower, and with a gift for interacting with the Thicket. Curious and armed with these abilities, Sève manages to escape the thorny lair, while Duramen fails at the very last moment. Sève is alone in a world she does not know. Surviving like a wild child, her skin covering over with thorns as the moons go by, she meets Petrichor, a member of the Criers, who preserve the stories of vanished humanity, rendering them in an ancient Irish script, ogham. So this is where the words the Mother heard came from: in the beginning was the Cry. Taken under his wing, Sève goes with him to his Sylvage, where the Criers live. Sève, the only woman, and covered in thorns besides, is unsurprisingly rejected by these men; wisdom has its limits. Sève couldn't care less about this rejection, possessed as she is by a quest that consumes her: to destroy the giant Root and free Duramen. Zéphyr, a young apprentice Crier in love with Sève, will join her in this perilous undertaking.

As the story unfolds, we witness the slow mutation of our heroine, in scenes worthy of *Avatar*, especially when the Na'vi connect with nature. Will Sève prevail? Is she the only hybrid born of the Thickets?

At once a human dystopia and an ecological fable, *Le livre de Sève* is a singular and intelligent novel. It only strengthened my deep conviction that Man, by pulling himself out of the web that is the mycelium, behaving like an arrogant autocrat who arranges the world like a French formal garden at the expense of everything around him, has only set in motion the infernal machine of his own downfall.

I can't help imagining poor Descartes revising his *Discourse on the Method* and its inescapable "I think, therefore I am," turning it into a more factual "I think, therefore I harm."

— Nicolas Becard

HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE (MLA)

Becard, Nicolas. "Le livre de Sève, by Charlotte Monsarrat." French Press, October 5, 2026, https://frenchpress.media/publications/le-livre-de-seve-charlotte-monsarrat.