



Soil

Jamie Kornegay

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A darkly comic debut novel by an independent bookseller about an idealistic young farmer who moves his family to a Mississippi flood basin, suffers financial ruin and becomes increasingly paranoid he's being framed for murder.

It all began with a simple dream. An ambitious young environmental scientist hoped to establish a sustainable farm on a small patch of river-bottom land nestled among the Mississippi hills. Jay Mize convinced his wife Sandy to move their six-year-old son away from town and to a rich and lush parcel where Jacob could run free and Jay could pursue the dream of a new and progressive agriculture for the twenty-first century. He did not know that within a year he'd be ruined, that flood and pestilence would invade his fledgling farm or that his wife and son would leave him to pick up the pieces by himself.

When Jay Mize discovers a corpse on his property, he is sure his bad luck has come to a head and he is being framed. Were Jay in his right mind, he might have reported the body to the police at the very same moment they were searching for a missing tourist from Ohio. He might have not dragged the body back to his farm under the cover of night and spent hours disposing of it. But Jay Mize is not in his right mind. His mounting paranoia is accelerated by a hot-rod local deputy, nosing around with questions about the missing tourist and making dark comments about Jay's estranged wife Sandy. It's enough to make an honest man a maniac.

Drawing on elements of classic Southern noir, dark comedy, and modern dysfunction, Jamie Kornegay's novel is about the gravitational pull of one man's apocalypse and the hope that maybe, just maybe, he can be reeled in from the brink. Readers will applaud the arrival of an exquisitely deranged new voice to American (Jonathan Miles, award-winning author of *Want Not* and *Dear American Airlines*).

Soil Details

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Author : Jamie Kornegay

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From Reader Review Soil for online ebook

Julianne (Outlandish Lit) says

Soil should have been everything I've ever wanted. A young environmental scientist, Jay, is in dire straits after his farm in Mississippi floods and his wife and son leave him. His dreams of creating sustainable farming for the future/potential apocalyptic situations seemed ruined. And then, to make matters worse, he finds a dead body on his property. Naturally, he assumes someone is framing him. So he sets out to get rid of the body, and sinks deeper and deeper into self-perpetuating paranoia.

This debut novel impressed me with its no fear attitude; it dove into paranoid madness, weird sex, family dysfunction, and kind of race as well. My only problem with it was how it went about covering those topics. Right away at the beginning of the novel, Jay is already deep into his paranoia. It was definitely hard to understand where it came from, because we didn't see it develop. In that sense Jay became more of a caricature of a paranoid man. And, while this book is described as a dark comedy and perhaps that could have been part of Kornegay's intent, he just felt underdeveloped. There was a certain lack of motivation. Same goes for the sex addicted cop. The characters felt a little thrown together with little purpose. Granted, they were interesting and it was often entertaining to be in their heads. Jay's justifications for his crazy actions were winding in their logic and incredible to witness. Equally good: some characters didn't appear as major players until after a while and the way the chapters jumped around very slightly in time was brilliant.

The jarring character development and questionable purpose of the characters wouldn't normally have annoyed me all that much, but for some reason this book just dragged for me. It took me a week and a half to get through. There just wasn't enough driving Jay's paranoia for me to be able to race through it. It felt like I was constantly waiting for something to happen, which isn't a good sign.

Overall, this was a super original piece of gritty Southern literature. I had some qualms with the pacing and characters. The ending was a bit of a let down, but Kornegay is a talented writer with some interesting things going on in his brain. I'd be interested to see where he takes things next.

If dead animals or uncomfortable descriptions of sex aren't for you, maybe don't check this out.

Also, about the race thing. It was brought up several times, but never really explained. Or at least it didn't seem to factor into the end and it was never a large plot point? If anybody's read this book, please let me know your thoughts! It felt kind of thrown in, which is potentially troubling.

Full review: <http://outlandishlit.blogspot.com/201...>

Gail Strickland says

I really wanted to like this novel a lot. Unfortunately, it nearly bored me to death-a farmer finds a dead man in his fields (or rather the river near his fields), promptly becomes paranoid, his wife leaves because he's suddenly gone nuts, the local deputy sheriff is a pervert; I'm sure the author was trying to make a point about the environment or something, I sure couldn't find it.

Read as an ARC (thank goodness)-due to be published in March.

Kelsey says

-I received an advance copy of Soil for free through Goodreads' First Reads program in exchange for an honest review-

I'm giving *Soil* a three-star review because I think it deserves more than a two, but it's really more of a rounded-up 2.5. I really did like it, mostly, but certain things about it--which I'll be detailing here--really spoiled the book for me.

Firstly, let me say that Kornegay definitely has the makings of a great new voice in fiction. For a "debut novel," it's pretty darn good. The dialogue is realistic; the setting is great, and it really did keep me interested all the way through. One thing that I really appreciated is that Kornegay doesn't shove his vision of his characters down the reader's throat. He'll give a basic physical description, but he doesn't spend paragraphs describing each character's clothing, hairstyle, facial features, accent, or any other unnecessary details. If it's relevant to the story, he'll tell you, and if it's not, he won't. Same goes for his descriptions of the places his characters visit. Kornegay gives you just enough to set the scene and then goes on with the story. This leaves the details up to the reader's imagination, which was a nice touch, because it let me create my own vision of Jay Mize's country world and the people within it and just made the reading feel easier.

Secondly, I have to both agree and disagree with some of the critiques of *Soil*'s characters that I've come across so far. I disagree with the argument that Jay Mize, the main character, who finds himself ruined by flood and deserted by his wife, is incomprehensibly paranoid. "Preppers" like Jay, who are always suspicious of an imminent apocalypse, be it from solar flares, bombs, or a market crash, are quite real, and they don't all have some deep psychological reason for being that way. Furthermore, Jay has lived through a family tragedy (which I won't spoil here), which could be construed as the grounds for his paranoia, which can, indeed, get quite annoying and holier-than-thou, but isn't unfounded. That said, I agree that the characters do seem pretty one-dimensional. Jay is always paranoid and waiting for the other proverbial shoe to drop, expecting people to come after him and blame him for the murder of the man he finds floating in his flooded field. Sandy, his hard-done-by wife, keeps trying to reconcile with him, even when her every attempt to do so reminds her of why she left in the first place. Other characters, like Jay's neighbour Hatcher, just seem to be there to move the plot along and have little to no personality of their own. The only one who seems to have much complexity at all is Deputy Danny Shoals, the "Officer Good Guy" type who we quickly discover may be less virtuous than he seems.

That said, I could have given *Soil* a better rating even with the one-dimensional characters. The plot was intriguing and I wanted very much to see how Jay was going to come through his various misfortunes, which kept on coming as the story progressed. I was feeling pretty warmly towards the book as I reached the midpoint, and described it on my blog as being "balanced on a razor's edge." Everything seemed to be about to go one way or the other, and I was excited to see how all of the conflicts and problems were going to be resolved.

Then, well, the ending happened, and my little sparkler of excitement and anticipation fizzled sadly down to a scorched nub. Seeing as I had my hands on an advance copy and I don't want to spoil it for those who pick it up in 2015, I'll be blocking out the rest of my review, but suffice it to say that *Soil*'s ending pretty much spoiled the book for me and left me sitting there with my head cocked to the side, wondering what the heck had just happened.

The Reasons:
(view spoiler)

So, *Soil* isn't going to be something that I push my friends to read when it comes out in 2015. It isn't a badly written book, and I enjoyed reading it for the most part, but I found the ending to be very disappointing for a number of reasons. Kornegay seems like he has the potential to be a very good author, and I would probably pick up another book of his in the future, because the majority of *Soil* captured my imagination and intrigued me, making me want to keep going and see how it all turned out. It just kind of fell on its face towards the end.

Andy Weston says

Despite the enticing Tom Waits quote at the beginning of the book I was disappointed by this much hyped novel from Kornegay. It's premise also is an attractive one, that of a young farming family living off grid in the Mississippi basin. As the novel starts the tranquil life the family yearned for is falling apart. Jay Mize's wife has left him with their 6 year old son, a flood has wiped out his crop and irreparably damaged much of equipment and buildings, and he discovers a corpse on his land.

Some reviews call it 'darkly comic'. That was an attraction to me also, but I didn't find it funny at all.

Rather, I found the story contrived, cashing in even on the the current surge in sustainable farming. I expect in the US at the moment this will be a big attraction, along with its occasional unnecessary political comments. I may be overly cynical but it didn't impress me.

It is a cast of unlikeable characters , which is fine, I enjoy many such novels, but this is the sort of novel for which you need to side with someone, and I couldn't empathise with any of them.

Zoeytron says

Paranoia strikes deep. Into your life it will creep. - Buffalo Springfield

Jay Mize has a head full of notions. It begins with a sincere wish to get back to nature and develop farming methods that are natural and friendly to the environment with compost piles, trellises, and whatnot. Before long, his simple ideas morph into obsession. Here is a man who has spent too much time reading about conspiracy theories and dire prophecies of doom, and believing all of it. His grasp on reality is slipping. He is now listening to the dirt, sometimes eating it, learning from it.

As the story opens, Jay discovers a dead body on his property. He is convinced that the body has been placed there by a bad egg deputy in order to frame him for murder. A nosy neighbor just fans the flames by poking around and asking questions. Jay's paranoia goes into maximum overdrive as he sets about destroying the body, in a natural, earth-friendly way, of course.

karen says

Somehow the smallest things can break us, and the hairline fracture deep within the young scientist spread over the next several months.

okay, i am in the minority here, so make of this what you will, but i really enjoyed this book. and if blurbs can be trusted, so did tom franklin, and if i'm going to be in any minority, i feel perfectly comfortable with that if he's standing beside me.

this book grabbed me from the first page, and i was hooked like a fishie.

jay mize is an environmental scientist studying soil for the farm service agency when he becomes obsessed with compost and the deterioration in soil quality by modern farming practices. no one seems interested in his alarmist warnings and rants, and he is subjected to whispers and pranks and the bewildered patience of his wife as his bizarre experiments take over their property.

He felt rather like a young suburban Moses, entrusted with critical information from on high that the general rabble was too distracted to glean. The agency confirmed this by requesting his resignation.

with the loss of his job, he is free to indulge his increasingly unstable prepper/prophet mentality, and moves his wife sandy and son jacob to a piece of property off the beaten path where they will be able to live off the grid in bucolic self-reliance.

What the naysayers didn't understand was that it wasn't some quaint old notion or a naive fondness for yesteryear, not even an entrepreneurial move toward trendy organic farming that made him come out here, all the way to nowhere, to invest the family savings in this house and the soggy fields and all the tools and equipment required to make a proper start. He'd read the books on climate change, energy crises, and colony collapse. He'd read The Road. He'd studied the ancient prophecies, the newer ones too, noting all the harbingers of environmental and economic ruin. A comeuppance was due, and he didn't want to be stuck in town among the bleating mobs when it all went down. He aimed to be prepared, to protect his family from it when it came, whatever it was and however awful, this thing he'd begun to believe like a religion.

they pick up stakes and move to this new eden, with all of jay's knowledge and training and ambitious ideas.

A year later they were ruined.

which is a grim way to open a book, but it's going to get much worse.

the property has been completely flooded - to the extent that it can be traveled over by boat. the tender crops and greenhouse are ruined, his equipment submerged, his wife and child gone to live in less insalubrious surroundings. jay is completely bankrupt, barely surviving in his wreck of a house without heat or electricity, "near starvation," given over to the scrawny, longhaired, wiry-bearded state of a paranoid man living in isolation, utterly destroyed.

and then he finds a body on his land.

and then things get *really* bad.

Every time he guessed he'd hit rock bottom, it was just slow sinking mud underfoot, and there was no telling how low he might get, how long it might take to disappear completely.

jay's loner paranoia and general suspicion of others has made him an outsider, and a target for the suspicion of others, and while he doesn't think that he is responsible for the corpse, he knows that he won't be believed if the police get involved. his appearance, his soapboxing, and his family name with its attached historical scandal make him hesitate to call the authorities, and he twists his idealistic embrace of self-reliance to include "what to do when you find a dead body on your property."

considering how well self-reliance has served him thus far, you can guess how well this goes for him.

i found this to be a completely engrossing and entertaining book.

i loved the story, and the way events escalate based on misperceptions and unfortunate coincidences. we get shifting third person limited POVs from a number of characters, so the distance between one character's intentions and another's interpretation of their actions is crystal clear and occasionally shocking, but always completely true to that character's own perspective. and i thought that was perfectly, intricately managed.

and speaking of perspective - DAMN - the reader is jostled about like crazy. the very first chapter is kind of a flash-forward where you're not really sure what you're looking at. and once you return to that scene later, it's both a great POV shift, and a bit of a sympathy shift as well. and the book uses this structure-shift a few times - a scene will occur only to recur later from an alternate viewpoint, with new information to adjust your understanding of what is happening vs. what the characters involved think is happening. and i thought he handled that so well.

this perspective thing is handled in a more humorous way with the character of deputy danny shoals. we follow along with his POV stuff, unquestioningly accepting what we learn about him through his own veil, but the first time he is seen through the eyes of someone else, it is ... different. and it's a great bit of forced reader-adjustment. it made me think of my very favorite scene in *And the Ass Saw the Angel*, when there is a sudden shift from first to third-person and you are looking down on a character whose head you have been living in for the duration of the book, and it's a very revelatory moment of yikes. but it's not at all funny in nick cave's version.

as far as the negative reviews go - yeah, i understand the criticisms. the characters don't have a ton of depth and there's some iffiness when it comes to motivation. but i honestly thought that sandy had some extremely strong scenes, and i remember being pretty impressed with how a male author was able to get into the head of a woman just starting to lose her beauty and all the attendant self-consciousness that goes with it.

and jay's decline into paranoia seems sudden at first, but i think kornegay did a pretty good job of dropping in backstory throughout the text that made it clear that his transformation was a gradual process. and reading those first couple of chapters again after finishing the book is kind of chilling.

and yesssss the ending was a little ... unexpected, and was kind of a convenient synthesis of nearly fantastical components, but we're in southern gothic/grit lit territory. it's a genre with some wriggle room when it comes to vérité.

and yesssss there was some unfinished business, but none of that bothered me in the slightest. i genuinely enjoyed the story and the writing, and i thought it was a very strong debut.

me and tom franklin against the world.

come to my blog!

Mitzi says

Horrible, horrible, horrible book!

Shelby *trains flying monkeys* says

Jay Mize starts off as an environmental farmer. He studies the earth and wants people to realize that they are poisoning the soil with chemical fertilizers and weed killers. He begins to get ummm strongly opinionated about it after someone takes a poop in one of his compost piles. He moves out of town with his wife and son to begin the farm of his dreams. A year later it's all over. His wife has left him and moved into town with his son, the crops all are dead due to flooding and drought.

Then Jay finds a dead body on his property. His paranoia is fueled by the town horn-dog deputy. He is sure that he will be framed for murder so he decides to do away with the body. (Don't eat during this part)

Jay's paranoia makes the reader either hate him or feel sorry for him. I went through both emotions with him. I wanted to slap him and save him. There just is no way out for this guy.

Deputy Shoals also plays a big part in this story and the views switch from several different characters. The author does a wonderful job with not allowing that to become confusing. At first you have Deputy Shoals through his own eyes and he justifies the things that he does. He is a ladies man *cough-cough* He just can't leave them alone. Jay's wife becomes an object of his desire after she doesn't fall at his feet. Then we see him as others see him and I hated him even more.

This book is dark, with humor slipped in to keep things interesting. The only thing that I can see some readers not enjoying is the ending. There is no neat wrap up at the end. I don't think this book needed it. Sometimes it's better to still have questions.

LeAnne says

Incredible first novel for this author. I could not help falling for, despairing for, and rooting for Jay, the young farmer whose paranoia is painful to witness.

The chapter structuring was set such that overlapping timeframes and points of view popped up with regular surprises in the story line. Loved that! This was very cleverly written. Quentin Tarantino would turn green with envy for Kornegay's writing chops. This author brings in the quirk, cooks it into crazy but does so with no horrible violence.

There is some macabre, step by step creation of charcoal that seems like a parallel for the sweet main character's sanity. Throughout the story, I hoped and hoped that his wife and boy would help him find his way back to health and that his hydroponic farm would succeed - that tension sustained me until I found the answer at the tale's end.

Darkly comic, full of love "Soil" will keep you tied to this tale until the final page.

Stephen Roth says

Jay Mize has a gorgeous wife, a young son, and a cozy little bungalow in town. That's not enough for him. Jay has a dream - to till some land, develop a new way of growing crops and, in the process, change how life is sustained on earth. The dream gnaws at Jay until he decides to pursue it, and the results are disastrous. Within a year, the river has flooded his farm, his wife and son have left, and Jay is slowly starving to death. What he finds one day floating on his ruined land adds a macabre twist to Jay's struggle, and sets up the central dilemma of Jamie Kornegay's excellent first novel, *Soil*.

Set in a Mississippi town, written in wry prose, and populated with remarkably defective characters, *Soil* is reminiscent of the darkly comic works of writers like Clyde Edgerton, James Wilcox, and others. Crazy shenanigans in a Southern town are not exactly unplowed literary ground, but *Soil* offers a contemporary perspective on an old lesson: be careful what you wish for. Jay's isolated quest for greatness, fueled by cable news conspiracy theories and doomsday scenarios, drive him to madness. That madness leads to some stunningly bad decisions that get Jay into a heap of trouble. Kornegay writes about this descent with sharp, vivid passages that are sometimes harrowing enough to make your stomach spin. The descriptions of the ramshackle house and devastated crops on Jay's property are equally powerful. It's clear that the writer has an intimate appreciation for the natural forces that make the Delta such a strange, tormented place.

Other characters resonate in *Soil*. Danny Shoals is a hot-rodding deputy with a keen eye on replacing his uncle as county sheriff. Unfortunately, Danny's eye for every short skirt in town, along with an urge to peep under other folks' window shades at night, threaten to destroy his plans. Sandy Mize is Jay's pretty but long-suffering wife. Her inner conflict over whether or not to save her marriage make Sandy a sympathetic character, but not a helpless one. Her sparring sessions with the delusional Jay contain some of the book's strongest dialogue.

It's natural to categorize this novel as Southern fiction because of its locale and storytelling style. But the weaknesses that most of the main characters carry - grand ambitions, flawed logic, extreme narcissism - know no geographic boundaries. *Soil* is a cautionary but entertaining tale about what can go wrong when we want something just a little too much.

Tara says

3.5 stars for me. *Soil* has its imperfections, but it's beautifully written and keeps you engaged. I would not have marketed this as a dark comedy. Nothing about it was funny for me. Not the topic of a man losing his mind, a peeping Tom sex addict cop, a smart woman caught in the middle of these two delightful men, a sweet boy REALLY caught in the middle, nor the death and subsequent composting of a black man (not racially motivated, but still, why is he black?). There are some truly disgusting scenes I had to skip over, but I kept on because of the strong voice and strong setting and pretty well-drawn characters, despite being unreliable, unsympathetic narrators. But I do like how Kornegay handled the female love interest in the book, gave her no *Knights in Shining Armor* for a change, and allowed her some dignity. This is more of a southern thriller. So read it if you like the good stuff I mentioned and like literary thrillers. Kornegay is a very talented writer. Don't read if you can't stomach the bad stuff I had to reveal to write this review.

Theresa Leone Davidson says

Every time I picked this up to read over the last week I wished there was a freshly painted wall in front of which I could sit and watch the paint dry. To call this novel boring is an insult to all of the boring books that

somehow get published. It's about an environmental scientist who moves off the grid with the intention of creating new ways to farm organically, he finds a dead body, and as he is already paranoid, he decides to get rid of the body instead of being normal and calling the police. Sounds like it would be good, right? It wasn't. One star is one star too many - Goodreads needs a zero star option.

Rachel Watkins says

There are books written where the setting and place plays a central role and serves to anchor the story. Jamie Kornegay has done this with SOIL as this story could only exist in Mississippi. The characters are authentically southern and The Mississippi Delta is as alive as you and me in SOIL. Read this book to try and understand the culture of The Delta. Read this book and become entrenched in Jay Mize's struggle to reclaim his family. Read SOIL because Mississippi is unlike any other state in the U.S. and you secretly want to be a fly on the wall of what happens there. This Mississippi girl gives SOIL five stars.

Andela says

Introduction:

I received this book for free in a first reads giveaway. Then I read it; that's about it. Thanks Simon and Schuster Canada and Goodreads!

What I Liked About It:

1) Jay's paranoia

I thought it was very interesting to watch Jay's paranoia progress. From the beginning to the end we see him unravel more and more. In particular, I loved reading all of his justifications for everything. If he doesn't do this than that will happen; if he does that than this will happen. The neat part was that he wasn't necessarily wrong. Sure, they may have been unlikely scenarios, but every scenario he played out was possible. It was a really interesting thing to read that and be like huh, I guess maybe he has a bit of a point?

I also really enjoyed being able to see this from his point of view. Too often you have that person that's a little on the odd side (okay a lot on the odd side), but you only see them as others see them. It's nice to be able to see it from their perspective for a change. You see the challenges they face; you witness their reasoning and justifications. It makes the character more sympathetic and helps us to understand why they do the things they do.

2) How things connect

The book isn't always entirely linear and I really enjoyed that. You get to see after the fact how something factors into the bigger picture. It was also really neat because you got to see the same scene from multiple perspectives. For example, the opening chapter with Leavenger and his dog. We aren't sure at the beginning how this is going to factor into the rest of the story, and the actions of the other character (who we learn later to be Jay) are so absurd you can't help but wonder what lead him up to this point. The book then re-begins at an earlier point in time and revisits this scene later on in Jay's point of view. I really enjoyed watching everything fall into place. It was great to see all the connections and get answers to the questions I had the first time around.

3) Originality

It's certainly an original story if nothing else. I have never read anything quite like this before and while the whole story didn't grip me there were definitely parts that piqued my interest. I don't have much else to say about this but points for creativity!

4) The writing

The writing is incredibly well done. Kornegay definitely has a good voice for storytelling. I found it had just the right amount of, well, pretty much everything. It was descriptive without being too descriptive. It had a good amount of dialogue without having too much dialogue. The pacing was quick without being too quick. The writing was just so well balanced that this easily could have been a 5-star book – and probably is for many people - just...not for me.

What I Didn't Like About It:

1) Everything is ugly

There is nothing pretty in this book. Aside from Shoals who, while pretty on the outside, is a bit of an ugly person on the inside. There is no contrast between the dark and the dreary and the bright and the beautiful. Everything is murky swamps, and ugly personalities, and ugly appearances and rundown dirty houses and it just all seems so lifeless and drab. Jay's son Jacob seems to offer the only innocence and light in the entire novel. I'm always looking for that light at the end of the tunnel and if you do too, be forewarned it never comes in this book.

2) Loose ends

I felt like none of the story lines had a conclusive end! It's so frustrating reading something to find out what's going to happen to the characters...and then you don't know because it's all still up in the air at the end of the book.

What happened with Shoals? What happened with Sandy and Jacob and Sandy's dad? And really, what happened with Jay? Because I felt like his story line ended so obviously and so vaguely at the same time. It just felt too coincidental and too hazy. I kept questioning: is this really happening? Or is this like imagery or symbolism or some other fancy writing mechanism? I guess I just didn't quite get it. Or rather, I didn't quite find it believable. That poor old Leavenger seems to be the only one who got a real, conclusive end and even so, I STILL HAVE QUESTIONS.

3) No likeable main character

I didn't like a single main character. And I didn't like that I didn't like a single main character. I didn't find the characters had any appealing or redeeming qualities. I didn't find I could relate to any of them. In the end, there was no one I was rooting for – everyone was just simply moving the story along. Yes, that's personal preference, but it was very difficult for me to get into a novel when I couldn't care less what happened to anyone. The only character I felt any real sympathy for was Jacob and he had a relatively easy role. There are many unfortunate circumstances and there is a lot of tragedy in this book. I wish I could have felt sympathy towards the characters; I wish they brought out some emotion in me.

Favourite Passage:

"He became one with the disaster of his life, as if he and the memory of his family and the scraps of their mistakes and failures were mashed together in the hands of some greater power, pressed down, rolled into a ball, stacked, watered, tumbled, and spread out to grow taller and stronger, ready to flourish at last in practiced earth." (P. 355)

Final Verdict:

I think there may be a niche for this book, but unfortunately I was not a part of it. It was well written for sure, but the plot just didn't grip me like it might other people. I don't think I would recommend this to any one I know, but if you're a fan of southern literature with a bit of a mysterious edge it's worth a shot.

Rating:

3 stars.

Howard says

SOIL

By Jamie Kornegay

Simon and Schuster. 355 pp. \$26

Reviewed by Howard Frank Mosher

Not to put too fine a point on it, James "Jay" Mize is as mad as a hatter. Jay, the obsessed soil conservationist and environmental extremist at the center of Mississippi writer Jamie Kornegay's brilliant new novel, *Soil*, has just been laid off by the local Farm Service Agency. He precipitously sells his house in town and drags his family out to the hinterlands to farm organically. When a deluge of diluvian proportions wipes out his entire crop of vegetables, Jay's wife and their young son return to town, leaving him to his own crazed salvage operations.

As if all this isn't enough, Jay discovers a corpse (missing a hand) near the receding river. In his isolation and growing paranoia, nothing will do but he must somehow burn the body to a crisp before the local authorities discover it on his property.

"Pulling the man from the muddy field and hacking him to bits were just the beginning. Now he had to reduce the body to its finest elements and disperse them back into the world. To properly incinerate the remains, he'd have to generate as much heat inside the metal drum as possible. . . . He'd spent the evening shearing the bones from their stubborn cinches of ligaments and muscles, all fastened together with a sticky collagen that enveloped him like a spider's web, and now he crouched over the campfire in Neanderthal mode, throwing them on one and two at a time, turning them with grilling tongs."

Clearly, Kornegay is working here in the Southern-noir tradition of Faulkner and Flannery O'Connor.

Cormac McCarthy, too, would understand Kornegay's bloody family feuds, dark humor, and remote, harsh

landscape that shapes its independent-minded, often-violent residents much more than they shape it. So too would have Jamie Kornegay's long-time friend and literary mentor, the recently deceased, great Tennessee novelist, William Gay.

Like Gay, Kornegay, who manages the wonderful (and wonderfully named) Turnrow Bookstore in Greenwood, Mississippi, knows his particular corner of the South inside out. His knowledge of the Mississippi Delta and its people is both encyclopedic and intimate. Don't even bother looking in his fiction for zombies, angels, aliens, international intrigue or celebrity confessions. Yet for all his Gothic humor, many of Kornegay's best scenes, particularly those involving Jay and his little boy, are unsentimentally tender.

For my money, *Soil* is contemporary fiction of the first order, written straight from the heart in highly imagistic, often poetic prose, by a gifted storyteller who's as wild and fearless and true at heart as they come. This is a hilarious, horrifying, and, just beneath the surface, heartbreaking novel.
