

*It's May, and I Want to Live Again*, by Beth May

Reviewed by Jae Blondo (Literary Arts 2024)

Beth May says her poetry isn't like other girls, and then calls herself a hypocrite because her book is titled "The Immortal Soul Salvage Yard". *"I said I related"* because I too have found myself hypocritical of my own work as a writer. However, in my experiences with Beth's book, I have found myself shaken to my core, sobbing as a thunderstorm does while raining, and being startled by the very same thunderstorm's electricity.

Beth May does not write easy to digest, nice poetry, but you can take a message from it, no matter your knowledge of "big words", or poetry's rhetoric. Beth confronts topics in "The Immortal Soul Salvage Yard" that many people can only hope to speak up about. She trailblazes a path for poets young and old, those with familiarity to the form, and ones new alike, to show a different way to write and experience poetry.

"The Immortal Soul Salvage Yard" is the first and only poetry collection published by Beth May. She is a writer, actor, poet, and truly amazing human based in Los Angeles, California. She writes scripts for film and stage, is one of 5 members of the hit D&D podcast "Dungeons and Daddies", writes short stories, is a spoken word and (with the release of "The Immortal Soul Salvage Yard") a published poet, and tops it off with comedic tweets and posts to make you laugh.

When I was preparing for this review, I read through all of "The Immortal Soul Salvage Yard", for the third or fourth time. While writing, I found I needed to read through it another 2 or 3 times; and in this some of the magic of the collection comes through. Lines I didn't notice the first time would hit me like a punch to the gut, *"I knew what it was like to pass / off your soul to strangers / like a bad Goodwill bucket hat"* and *"But I forget without sunlight almost nothing can live"*, and I found lines I read the last time sent me spiraling into tears time and time again *"Be kind until you doubt them / Until the kindness hemorrhages and you hate them"* and *"5 / It's May and I want to live again."*

Beth's poetry gets at key parts of the human experience; connection with others and fighting your brain trying to self-sabotage you. She addresses topics like serious mental illness, such as major depressive disorder symptoms *"It's April and I don't want*

*to lie another night on this / couch if its cushions won't gulp me down with my / greasy hair and dirty face" or "Professor I can not get out of bed / Professor I can't move can I write a lab paper on paralysis."* and bipolar disorder, as well as maniac episodes that come with it ("*2 Electric" or "Flat Earth"*). She comes back to a couple of specific feelings, those being electricity and amnesia; as well as a specific person, as well as her experiences with him. This person is never named, just referred to as "The Boy".

Beth met him in 2012, and they fell deeply in love with each other. In 2013, she revealed to him that she was sick; that she had a mental illness. Then in 2014 she got 38 consecutive treatments of ECT (electroconvulsive therapy), in Arizona where they (dangerously) will do both sides of the brain at the same time. She was okay, and she says the treatment "saved her life", but she did have two major side effects. "Aphasia" is a loss of ability to speak or communicate due to injury in the brain, and "Retrograde Amnesia" is a loss of memory, usually lasting about 3 months, however it can be permanent.

After one of her treatment's in 2014, he was driving Beth home and she woke up and asked "What is your name?" which terrified him. She mentions him a lot throughout the book, including the poems "There Never Was a Hat", "LOVE PART TWO: EPILOGUE", "LOVE PART ONE: FUTURE", and "Long Distance Call". She says she writes a lot of poems for and about him "*I wrote a letter to explain to the boy that I no longer loved that I had run out of metaphors for the texture of his hair"*. She remarks in her live reading ("Live in Long Beach" [Micah Bournes & Beth May]) "*I was also dating this guy at the time, um... who I, you know, I loved him and we had a great relationship. And he was wonderful.*" Describing her experience with him, she gets choked up and cuts herself off, which shows just how much she was impacted by this specific symptom from this treatment.

I can understand her feelings on this, having been strongly impacted by amnesia from various mental illnesses and side effects from medications to help those illnesses. It's really hard to forget someone and your entire history with them. I found I tend to do the same thing she does as a result, where I put so much more effort and attention into my current relationships, especially friendships because they matter so much to me.

"The Immortal Soul Salvage Yard" is such a great book, and Beth is a truly talented and inspiring poet. Whether it's a hike to support NAMI ([the] National

Alliance on Mental Illness) that offers support to people living with mental illness and their families, or putting biweekly episodes of a podcast out centered around generational trauma and just simple comedy to make people laugh, Beth May is a individual that comes along once every century. "The Immortal Soul Salvage Yard" is a book that showcases her both at her best and at her worst. I could say so much more about the book, and the best way to hear more about it, is to go read the book itself! You can find it at most bookstores (or they can order it in), and on platforms like Audible and Apple Books, where you can listen to the audiobook, read by Beth herself.

*Beth can be found on social media (Instagram / Youtube / Twitter / TikTok) "@HeyBethMay" and emailed at "contactbethmay@gmail.com". She also has 2 albums out on Spotify: "Sunday Scaries", an album addressing similar themes as found in "The Immortal Soul Salvage Yard", as well as featuring 3 poems from the poetry collection; and "Live In Long Beach" with Micah Bournes, a taped and edited version of their shared reading & book release event, in which they both share various stories about the process of creating the book, and read some various poems that are in the book.*

*Jae Blondo is a returning senior at Perpich Center for Arts Education. They enjoy exploring themes of identity, mental illness, being human, and intersectionality through spoken word, short stories, and personal essays. When they aren't writing, you can find them at a local cafe soaking up good vibes, cooking up a storm in a kitchen, or painting landscapes from their imagination. Jae can be found on Instagram "@TheWoodfirePoet", and has a spoken word album coming out later this year on Spotify.*