

Review

Kimmy Beach, *The Last Temptation of Bond* (Edmonton, Alberta: The University of Alberta Press, 2013), 114 pp. Paper. \$19.95. ISBN 978-0-88864-643-9.

The Last Temptation of Bond is both a parody of pop culture and a work of modernist literature. It is as irreverent in tone as it is deeply humorous. Several of the pieces were staged in *Over the Edge with Bond* at Red Deer College in 2009 and others have appeared, in slightly different form, in *Room* and *CV2* as well as online at canadianpoetries.com.

Beach's parody tells the story of the cultural icon James Bond and how he is forced to come to terms with his own mortality. The women in his life move in for the kill. They are ten in total, all of whom are listed at the beginning in the form of a cast. Many of the vignettes take the form of dramatic dialogue among the women, though sometimes with Bond himself. Some of the women are dead, some alive. Those who are still living either seek revenge or attempt to drown the pain of their infatuation with Bond in copious quantities of alcohol. Only one, aptly named 'One', is strong enough to resist Bond's charm; she is destined not only to survive him but to control him – if only in death.

Throughout, Bond is both a character on the screen and a figure in the narrative. He looks at himself on screen and compares the film version with 'reality'. As a result, he is forced to acknowledge that his life is empty and the glamour and charm that so many women admire in him is only a veneer.

Initially infatuated by Bond, One gradually releases herself from his power. As the one who lays out Bond's body, she has the opportunity to manipulate the dead cultural icon as she chooses. She is brutal and the description of her preparations is somewhat shocking. She massages, for example, 'Bond's fingers out of rigor mortis/shaves his chin and throat/pulls hair from his nostrils and ears/pulls back the eyelids/ . . . /inserts semispherical plastic cones over each eye/' (107). The absence of punctuation in the text demonstrates One's total power over the situation: she has no need for convention. Significantly, the narrator notes

that 'Bond is silenced' by One's manipulation of his mouth. The horror mounts as the narrator describes how One 'vacuums out' Bond's organs, placing his heart and lungs in a plastic bag that she then sews 'back inside the mangled corpse' (108). The power of woman is doubly reinforced in this vignette: not only is it One who prepares Bond's corpse, it is Miss Money Penny who is given the task of selecting the coffin.

The final words of *The Last Temptation of Bond* read '**JAMES BOND WILL NOT RETURN**' (111). The cultural icon can no longer be tempted by women; neither will the latter be tempted by him – One's disfiguration of Bond's corpse, which lies in an open coffin, is designed to ensure this. One represents all women who wish to emancipate themselves from male charm and the lure of naked sex. Bond's fate symbolises the theme of *The Last Temptation of Bond*, summarised in the words on the back cover: 'you can't stop it. everyone's expendable, James. everyone's replaceable. even you. especially you'. Not even the greatest cultural icon can survive death.

Divided into three main parts, 'Real Men are no Competition', 'His Moment of Doubt and Pain' and 'The Last Temptation of Bond', Kimmy Beach's latest work echoes the crucifixion of Christ. Frequent references to rusty nails and the cross emphasise that Bond, like Jesus Christ, is destined to be sacrificed. But unlike Christ, Bond is not destined to rise again – One has made sure of that!

The Last Temptation of Bond is erudite and shocking, poetic and prosaic. Each section comprises dialogues and/or stage directions. The speaker is not always named. The narrator keeps the reader in suspense. Even at the end, at Bond's funeral, mystery abounds as an 'unknown family' makes its appearance at the funeral, only to disappear as fast as it appeared. Who are they? Where do they go? They disappear into thin air and 'are nowhere to be seen'. Is this real or is this a film? It is neither – and both!

The Last Temptation of Bond is for all readers, general as well as literary aesthetes. Where does pop culture end and modernist literature begin? It is hard to tell. But it does not matter because Kimmy Beach makes the transition for us – and its effect is invisible while at the same time tangible!

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