Bruce Hunter
a review of

The Last Temptation of Bond
by Kimmy Beach
The University of Alberta Press, 2013
$19.95

If you like your martinis dry, and your poetry wet, as in sweaty, steamy, and sexy, Kimmy Beach’s The Last Temptation of Bond, as in Bond, James Bond, is your book. It’s an entertaining, imaginative, and at times, tipsy romp through a range of fictional voices and dramatic styles in a compelling narrative that riffs off the Bond flicks, The Last Temptation of Christ, Martin Scorsese’s 1988 film based on Nikos Kazantzakis’ 1953 novel and Beach’s own reinvention of Agent 007.
Beach is Bard of the ‘burbs: pop charts, brand names, malls, movie theatres and lounges. Her voice is cool, but not flip, and ranges from Walter Benjamin references, through brand names from Converse, Aston Martin, to Dubonnet Gold and Shirley Bassey.

Beach’s previous books delve into the icons of pop culture from the Beatles, muscle cars, roller rinks and bar rooms to James Cagney. In The Last Temptation of Bond, she builds on this oeuvre and goes beyond entertainment to art that is gripping and haunting.

49 year-old Edmonton-born Beach was raised on an acreage outside the city with her sister, award-winning actress Karen Johnson-Diamond, a brother, Larry, and a St. Bernard prone to skunk run-ins. Beach lives in Red Deer with her husband of 26 years, Stu, a barber. Beach is well-known in Western Canada, as a
hard-working poet, editor and freelancer. She is also associate editor of Canadian Poetries. My first encounter with her work was a review of Barry Dempster’s *Dying a Little*, in *Freefall* (Volume XXXIII, Number 1). It is impressive - detailed and generous in its obvious affection for this important Canadian poet’s work. Generosity seems to be a hallmark of everything Kimmy Beach does.

With five books now, *Nice Day for Murder: poems for James Cagney* (Turnstone Press, 2001, 2004), *Alarum Within: theatre poems* (Turnstone Press, 2003), *fake Paul* (Turnstone Press, 2005), *in Cars* (Turnstone Press, 2007), and now *The Last Temptation of Bond* (The University of Alberta Press, 2013), Beach has developed a maturity of craft and a durable body of work that is bringing her wider recognition. *The Last Temptation of Bond* has “gone viral” and been widely reviewed, including in the
prestigious trade publication, Quill and Quire. This is Beach’s most mature and sophisticated book yet and one that lends itself to different readings whether as entertainment, a feminist text, or a sophisticated play of intertextuality. She knows pop culture and it is a rich culture that she brings to us.

*The Last Temptation of Bond* is beautifully produced with stunning artwork, end flaps and high gloss covers by University of Alberta Press. Editor Peter Midgley’s capable coaching is evident throughout. Beautiful form and intense, dramatic content come together in a book that deserves attention.

Given the preponderance of more typically “poetic” subjects for Canadian poetry, such as wild life, the land, or language itself, and a tendency towards the lyric, this is an interesting book. It harnesses the dramatic power of multiple voices in the narrative momentum of a
novel. The voices include The Bond Girls, One and The Other to name a few. And naturally Bond himself has a starring and show-stopping appearance replete with his sly references to Walter Benjamin, the famous social and literary critic, and comments on his own films. Beach is hilarious as a chain-yanker of the first rank. She toys with everyone and everything. As a former English major and stage manager, she understands plays and audiences.

Beach engages us with a variety of voices from the comedic to the ominous that animate a sustained performance in poetry and prose. These dramatic lines from “Especially You” set the mood aptly:

“you can’t stop it. everyone’s expendable, James. everyone’s replaceable, even you.”
especially you” (p. 67).

“Why James Bond?” I asked Beach, and she replied, “‘why not James Bond?’ I love James Bond. Writing about James Bond gives me a good deal of pleasure and joy. Sometimes it breaks my heart, but heartbreak is a kind of joy. I’ve always loved James Bond, and when I realized that I was obsessing over him, I paid heed and started writing.” For a reader, Beach’s joy is contagious and I can’t remember reading a poetry collection written like a whodunit.

Beach told me about her first Bond film: “I was in Paris on a backpacking trip with friends. We were 18 and walking down the Champs Elysees one September 1983 evening, and saw a film premiere across the street. Only now I realize it was Roger Moore, Maud Adams, and Louis Jourdan on the red carpet. The next night we returned to watch Octopussy. I had no idea what was going on in that movie, but something
twigged. Two years later, *A View To A Kill* tipped me over the Bond edge.”

The first half of the book is a series of retro poems that recall my parents’ smoky, boozy parties in the ‘50s, and what happened behind closed doors then. There are no closed doors here. Beach reveals in an utterly contemporary style a delicious bit of foreplay in “Suck the Love From You”:

> I make your lips cracked and dry. suck the love from you. inhale your mouth. drink the sweat from either side of your lips. I send you out of your mind for drink...rub the tumbler’s sweat over your parched mouth” (36).

I woke with a smoker’s cough and a vicarious hangover after reading these poems.
But the power of this book notches up when it enters its final phase. All of Beach’s talents come to bear: her obsession with obsession, clear-eyed observation, and focus, tender at times, steely-eyed as an assassin at others, and unbearably intense, almost always. She creates a parallel plot that moves between 007 answering for his “sins” and playing off Scorsese’s film and Kazantzakis’s book, Bond as loving father and husband. And she makes it believable.

This is poetry with a plot and I’m not about to give it away. How refreshing to see a poet explore all the possibilities: lyric, narrative and dramatic. It points to a bright future for a hard-working writer whose newest project is a novella. Based on Beach’s earlier books, specifically in Cars and now The Last Temptation of Bond, it’s a move that’s logical and inevitable. Her fans will be delighted.