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## Kill Bill, II

Frederick Ruf

Georgetown University, [rufb@georgetown.edu](mailto:rufb@georgetown.edu)

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## Kill Bill, II

### Abstract

This is a review of *Kill Bill, II* (2004).

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It's either an exquisite coincidence that *Kill Bill*, Parts 1 and 2, were released in the same 12 months as *The Passion of the Christ* or a sign of the times: modern religiosity in America may be bracketed by those two sensibilities and visions, one concerned with literalism and pain and the other with play and glee; one with the assault on and of the divine and the other with a choreography of the images we absorb as teens; one of the Book and the other of the comic; one gravely asserting divine depths and the other casting color and form skittering on the surface. We might hope there is room in the middle, but there is not. Writ large, these visions define our options.

*Kill Bill*, Part 2 continues the revenge tale of *The Bride* (Uma Thurman) who had been shot on her wedding day, rising from a coma to exact her vengeance on her former associates in *The Deadly Viper Assassination Squad*. Two ex-associates are killed in Part 1 (released in 2003) and two more plus their leader, Bill (David Carradine), in Part 2. It might seem ludicrous to take such a film seriously, as more than adolescent entertainment, but such an evaluation mistakes both it and us. Quentin Tarantino's film is a pastiche of the stories and styles that constitute a modern person, and is not entirely different from other works like "The Waste Land" or Pound's Cantos. East doesn't exactly meet West in this martial arts cum spaghetti western; rather the characters - and the Bride and Bill, especially - are East and West, but not as homage or even as adaptation of the genres. Rather,

Tarantino (and the *Bride and Bill*) speak those languages, as well as many more, and with a sense of enormous pleasure in their fluency.

The film(s) begin with a moment that might be mythic, a woman seemingly murdered at her wedding; a woman pregnant with the child of her murderer who is unaware of that fact until the moment he pulls the trigger. Then comes the vengeance of the woman, tracking down each of those responsible, until she confronts her lover who is, she believes, the killer of her child, only to discover the child is alive. It could be a story out of Faulkner. It has elements of *Beowulf*. It could be Greek tragedy. Other elements hint at profundity, as well. The Bride's name, Beatrix, is never pronounced but "beeped," as though it is the name that must not be said. She is buried alive and rises, thus she is the twice-killed and twice-risen. She undergoes a rigorous apprenticeship with a Chinese Master. Finally, she is reunited with her daughter and realizes something akin to her destiny. And yet none of these high-sounding themes, roles, and stories is presented with anything like gravity or profundity. None is an insight into the core of our humanity or trans-historical archetypes or depth psychology. Each is another colorful toy for Tarantino's delighted play.

Dialogue and visual imagery spin each potentially weighty element right onto the surface where each becomes utterly light, even brilliant. As is true for all Tarantino films, the characters speak in a manner that might be described as "arch" -

mischievous and sly, in ways that are not fully in character but off-center and revealing an intelligence or an intent elsewhere and other than we have seen before in that genre of film or type of character, as when Bill interrogates Bea and presents an involved theory of comic book superheroes in a convoluted but highly entertaining explanation for why he shot her. At times the dialogue suggests Hepburn and Tracy. At other times it suggests cannabis. The visual imagery is bold and broad, so that even violent segments are stunningly aesthetic, as when Bea has dug herself out of her grave and appears on the cliff overlooking the mobile home of her intended victim, Budd: the splattered texture and color of the dirt and blood on her face in close-up is a blending of skin and ground, those two surfaces we live on.

As Wittgenstein famously declared, "the world is everything that is the case." Contemporary religious thought has had to come to terms with that notion (and its many varieties in European and American thought). *The Passion of the Christ* assaults that dictum, making the case for transcendent pain. Intellectuals and theologians have been appalled but theatres have been filled with those who suffer gladly. *Kill Bill* paints a Wittgensteinian world of earthly delights, incorporating even pain, and never suggesting anything eternal or unworldly. Its audiences, too, have been thoroughly pleased, in its celebration of the world. If intellectuals are disappointed with Tarantino, it is because his world is seen as too lite and violence

not taken seriously enough. What if we are numbed to pain? What if we are entertained by it? But Tarantino is not the sole world-maker. The world, most fortunately, has many cases.