

Papatya Alkan-Genca

Violent Spaces, Violated Bodies : The Representations of Violence in Angela Carter's "The Passion of the New Eve" = Przestrzenie przemocy, skrzywdzone ciała : obrazy przemocy w powieści Angeli Carter "The Passion of the New Eve"

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Papatya Alkan-Genca

Manisa Celal Bayar University, Turkey

VIOLENT SPACES, VIOLATED BODIES: THE REPRESENTATIONS OF VIOLENCE IN ANGELA CARTER'S *THE PASSION OF NEW EVE*

PRZESTRZENIE PRZEMOCY, SKRZYWDZONE CIAŁA:
OBRAZY PRZEMOCY W POWIEŚCI ANGELI CARTER
THE PASSION OF NEW EVE

Abstract

Published in 1977, *The Passion of New Eve* depicts a dystopian America where violence has become the norm. From rape to murder, from re-creation to violation, the text provides a variety of contexts in which violence operates. Regardless of one's gender and sometimes because of that, everyone can become the victim or the perpetrator. Moreover, the spaces occupied by the characters contribute to the novel's handling of violence. This paper argues that Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* is a text in which space, self, gender, and body are the sites where violence is presented and re-presented, inflicted and experienced, and it contends that violence

Abstrakt

Opublikowana w 1977 roku powieść Angeli Carter *The Passion of New Eve* kreśli dystopijną wizję Ameryki, gdzie przemoc stała się normą. Od gwałtu do morderstwa, od przetworzenia do przekroczenia, tekst przedstawia szeroki wachlarz kontekstów, w jakich mamy do czynienia z przemocą. Bez względu na płeć, a czasem właśnie ze względu na nią, każdy może stać się ofiarą lub sprawcą. Co więcej, przestrzenie, w których przebywają bohaterowie mają wpływ na przedstawienia przemocy w powieści. Artykuł ten dowodzi, że powieść Angeli Carter *The Passion of New Eve* jest tekstem, w którym przestrzeń, tożsamość, płeć i ciało stają się miejscami,

serves as a means to problematize conventional ways of perceiving and making sense of gender and space.

Keywords: Angela Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, violence, self, body, space.

gdzie przemoc jest tworzona i odtwarzana, zadawana i doświadczana. Celem poniższego artykułu jest również wykazanie, że przemoc jest środkiem poddającym w wątpliwość konwencjonalne sposoby postrzegania i rozumienia zagadnień płci i przestrzeni.

Słowa kluczowe: Angela Carter, *The Passion of New Eve*, przemoc, tożsamość, ciało, przestrzeń

1. Introduction

Published in 1977, Angela Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* is a novel of many layers, and it is open to various categorizations: it is an example of science-fiction, dystopia, postmodern text, a parodic reflection on conventional gender codes, or it can be seen as a contemporary romance in which the protagonist undergoes a quest, though a quest of what is not necessarily answered. According to Andrzej Gasiorek,

New Eve rewrites the biblical account of creation, focusing less on the details of Genesis than on its consequences. The novel's central protagonist, another of Carter's overdetermined ciphers, is at once a male egotist who must be reborn, a modern counterpart to the Bible's Eve, an a secular surrogate for Christ who undergoes a kenosis in the desert and subsequently experiences a technological version of the Passion. [Gasiorek, 1995, p. 132]

Evelyn, who has a special obsession for an old Hollywood sensation called Tristessa, arrives at New York assuming to be employed by a university (presumably at the department of English literature); however, he soon realizes that it will be impossible as the city of New York is not even habitable for civilized life. Indeed, he exclaims that the “*tender little milk-fed English lamb that [he] was, landed, plop! heels first in the midst of the slaughter*” [Carter, 1982, p. 9]. Thus, from the very beginning, the narrative signals that the atmosphere drawn through the setting, as well as the tone set by the choice of words, is going to be bleak and unwelcoming. The black and the women of the city are engaged in rebellious and destructive acts of violence, and their action makes it impossible for the citizens to maintain normalcy. Indeed, it is a rather apocalyptic New York in which chaos reigns. Evelyn cannot work, but he cannot go back to London either, so he just remains in the city for a while. He has a brief but stormy relationship with an African-American girl called Leilah. His infatuation with Leilah rapidly cools down when he learns that Leilah is pregnant. He leaves the city after Leilah's botched abortion and the murder of his only friend Baroslav, a Czech alchemist. He is later on captured by the disciples of a mad scientist called Mother, who resides at a place called Beulah. Beulah becomes the very place in which Evelyn turns into Eve through a surgical intervention. He is also taught how to “be” a woman. He, who becomes a she after the operation, manages to escape only to be imprisoned by a man called Zero. Zero, who has a harem full of women, “marries” Eve and brutally rapes her, thereby turning her into his commodity. He is obsessed

with Tristessa, too, but for completely different reasons. He believes that Tristessa has bewitched him and stolen his virility. Thus, his life is dedicated to finding Tristessa and taking revenge. Eventually, he does find her, but it turns out that Tristessa is a man. Eve and Tristessa get married (though not by choice but by force), they run away from Zero and his harem, and experience their new-found gender in each other (Tristessa re-learns to be a “man” and Eve starts to enjoy having a female body). They are later captured by child-soldiers, and Tristessa is shot by one of the officers of a fourteen-year-old colonel, who sees Eve and Tristessa making love and decides to punish Tristessa for fornication. Eve manages to get away from the colonel and his people, too. She runs into Leilah, who has become a wisened-up and mature woman. It turns out that she is Mother’s daughter and that her name is Lilith. Eve goes into a cave, which symbolically is a return to the womb. And her journey ends at the ocean, without a proper or conventional closure.

J. Edward Ahearn argues that the apocalyptic vision created in the novel “*provides the setting for the sexual themes that comprise the main matter of Carter’s book*” [2000, p. 461]. He maintains that “*Evelyn/Eve’s unreliable narration and obsession with the film frame the story of Evelyn’s encounter with Leilah, his surgical reconstruction by the figure called Mother in the desert women’s city of Beulah, Eve’s abuse by Zero, and the experience with the cross-gendered actress Tristessa*” [Ahearn, 2000, p. 461]. This brief summary of the novel already highlights how the text is structured around a variety of spaces and numerous violent acts perpetuated by a number of different characters. The theme of violence is nothing new in Carter’s oeuvre. Talking about Carter’s first novel *Shadow Dance* [1966], Jacqueline Pearson, for example, contends that Carter creates a site “*where sexual desire is twisted by violence or futility, and where literature and art are transposed into their most fragmentary and meaningless forms*” [2006, p. vii]. The same fusion of violence and sexual desire can also be discerned in *The Passion of New Eve*. Carter’s dystopic world presents and employs violence on various levels and in different ways.

This paper looks at the representations of violence in *The Passion of New Eve* in relation to space and gender. First of all, four distinct spaces from the text are selected as case studies, namely, New York, Beulah, the Desert, and Zero’s ranch, and they are discussed in terms of how space can be violent and violated in return. The characters of Evelyn, Mother, Zero, and Tristessa, who occupy these spaces, are examined so as to look at the junction points between violence and gender. It can be claimed that these spaces become violent specifically through their gender-related representations.

2. Violent Spaces and Violated Bodies

Nicoletta Vallorani contends that as a metaphor, “*the city occupies a crucial juncture in Carter’s imagination*” [1994, p. 367]. The most discernible conceptualization of violence is the depiction of the city of New York upon Evelyn’s arrival. The New York in *The Passion of New Eve* is depicted as a “grotesque, a hybrid, a postmodern and self-reflexive metropolis” [Vallorani, 1994, p. 370]. Although Evelyn does not really talk about or depict London, his reaction to what he sees upon his arrival and his subsequent

experience in the city indicate that New York marks not only a simple spatial change in his life but also a more fundamental shift. New York is an urban space but Carter plays upon the conventional perceptions of New York and presents a dystopic and negative space as opposed to a welcoming and advanced one. Evelyn's expectation and the actual reality clash with one another: "*I imagined a clean hard, bright city where towers reared to the sky in a paradigm of technological aspiration*" [Carter, 1982, p. 10] utters Evelyn. However, New York provides "*instead of hard edges and clean colors, a lurid, Gothic darkness that closed over my head entirely and became my world*" [Carter, 1982, p. 10]. Urban space is violated and violating in return. Once a pillar of civilization, New York becomes the epitome of civilization gone wild. It is a decaying urban jungle where different factions fight for dominance. In other words, the city is in ruins, chaos ensues and two groups – the blacks and the women – are terrorizing the city with their militant attacks. Moreover, urban space has become "destroyed" as rats – most of which are bigger than the dogs – devour the city and the inhabitants, making it impossible for New Yorkers to maintain a civilized lifestyle. Indeed, New York as such becomes a parody of the urban experience which is marked by chaos, violence, disorder, and apathy. The stark difference between what Evelyn imagines New York to be and what the reality is highlights the violent state of things. He expects New York to be like its representations in movies, yet he is faced with a completely opposite image. The representation of New York as such can also be read as a critique of the Enlightenment ideal that through technological advancement and science the human condition will get better. Indeed, the reverse is presented to be the case in *The Passion of New Eve*. It is ironic, actually, that the first person Evelyn meets is a man named Baroslav whose wife was raped and then dismembered by the Gestapo. The irony lies in the fact that Baroslav escapes one site of violence only to be situated within another. He meets a gruesome death, "*beaten to death [...] although the blood and hair on his empty pistol indicated this hero of the resistance had furiously laid about him with the butt before the unknowns vanquished him*" [Carter, 1982, p. 18]. With the death of his only friend in the city, Evelyn feels the isolation, loneliness, and terror of New York even more. Yet, when he meets a seventeen year-old African American girl called Leilah, she becomes the sole focus of his attention. Indeed, he openly admits that in his narrative: "*As soon as I saw her, I was determined to have her*" [Carter, 1982, p. 19]. The choice of verb is peculiar and significant here, because Evelyn does admit to wanting to possess her like one possesses a commodity rather than be with her as an equal. Likewise, in his relationship with her, Evelyn sees a definite fusion of sex and violence; indeed these two go hand in hand and define the relationship. He devotes a big portion of his narrative of New York to his sex games with Leilah:

Waking just before she tore the orgasm from me, I would, in my astonishment, remember the myth of the succubus, the devils in female form who come by night to seduce the saints. Then, to punish her for scaring me, I would tie her to the iron bed with my belt [...] Then I would go out and leave her to her punishment [...] If she had fouled the bed, I would untie her and use my belt to beat her. And she would foul the bed again, or bite my hand [Carter, 1982, p. 27–28].

His treatment of Leilah resonates well with the violent atmosphere fostered by New York itself. In fact, it can be taken as a metaphorical representation of New York as depicted at the beginning of the novel. The city does not allow any other form of relationship but this. Instead of a relationship based on love and respect, theirs is based on cruelty and domination. Such violent games, however, soon turn into boredom and indifference on Evelyn's part. Once it becomes clear that Leilah is pregnant, Evelyn wants to be as far away from her as possible. Giving what little money he has to Leilah for abortion, Evelyn leaves New York.

He drives towards East to the desert. The desert proves to be a hostile territory from the very beginning. Evelyn defines it using words with negative connotations, comparing the surrounding landscape to

"an old fan that has lost all its painted silk and left only the bare, yellowed sticks of antique ivory [...] The earth has been scalped, flayed; it is peopled only with echoes. The world shines and glistens, reeks and swelters till its skin peels, flakes, cracks, blisters" [Carter, 1982, p. 41].

As it is evident in Evelyn's depiction, the desert functions as a foil to the overpopulated, oversaturated, chaotic urban jungle that is New York. However, it is not different from New York in terms of being a violent space.

Violence of the desert has two sources, one natural and one human-made. Evelyn's depiction of the desert already draws attention to how unforgiving the desert is with its scorching sun and vast empty space without any shelter. In addition to this natural hostility for human habitation, there is a more dangerous threat for Evelyn: the Mother and her Beulah and Zero and his ranch. In fact, Evelyn draws a parallel between the unwelcoming desert and violence in his description of Zero: *"Zero the poet adored the desert because he hated humanity"* [Carter, 1982, p. 85]; and he also calls Mother to possess *"too much mother; a femaleness too vast"* [Carter, 1982, p. 66]. These two extreme characters inhabit the two significant spaces in Evelyn's journey. Although owned by two ostensibly different characters, they both represent violence, especially as perpetrators.

His departure from New York, then, ends up in imprisonment by the minions of Mother, who runs a "crazy" lab called Beulah. Özüm suggests that *"New York'ta sorunlar zıtlıkların çarpışmasından kaynaklanırken, burada [Beulah'da] zıtlıkların birarada olması ideal bir durummuş gibi aktarılır"* [Özüm, 2009, p. 99] (While problems in New York sprang from the collision of opposites, here [in Beulah], coexistence of opposites is depicted to be an ideal situation) (translation mine). Beulah takes its name from William Blake's mythology. Indeed, Carter reiterates Blake directly in Evelyn's depiction of Beulah:

There is a place where Contraries are equally True

This place is called Beulah [Carter, 1982, p. 48] (*Milton: Book the Second*)

S. Foster Damon suggests that *"Blake placed Beulah as an intermediary between Eternity and Ulro (this world of Matter). The Lamb created Beulah as a refuge"* [2013, p. 43]. Beulah in *The Passion of New Eve*, however, is a hellish place which becomes

Evelyn's torture house; he experiences both physical and psychological violence in Beulah in the hands of Mother and her minions.

Beulah's importance for Evelyn's journey revolves around the owner of the place, Mother. Carter subverts the idea of a woman that is helpless, weak, meek, subservient, a woman who falls victim to violence, and she presents a larger-than-life, grotesque, and violent woman in the character of Mother. Violence of women is already noted at the beginning of the novel (in reference to the violent women in New York and their viciousness), but Mother takes it to a new level. Rebecca Munford argues that "*Carter's narratives enact an unrelenting assault on traditional images of the mother and maternal lineage*" [2006, p. 11]. Carter herself acknowledges the constructedness of myths, especially the ones concerning femininity and masculinity. In *The Sadeian Woman*, she contends that "*All the mythic versions of women, from the myth of the redeeming purity of the virgin to that of the healing, reconciling mother, are consolatory nonsense*" [1979, p. 5]. She further maintains that "*Mother goddesses are just as silly a notion as father gods*" [Carter, 1979, p. 5]. In order to disrupt¹ the conventional perceptions of the female, especially of the mother, Carter presents an ostensibly contrary image, and thus Mother in *The Passion of New Eve* stands out as a representative defiance against such conventional perceptions.

Through her vision to create a matriarchal society based on a newly invented mythology (which is actually a subversion of existing stories, such as *Oedipus Rex* and Greek mythology), Mother challenges the conventions from within. She is a scientist (although scientific thinking and rationality have been traditionally associated with men) and a nurturing mother-like figure (hence the name). However, both her scientific identity and her motherhood are distorted and subversive. Her physical description also contributes to this subversion; in fact, it is almost parodic as she has two rows of breasts and a vagina that alludes to a cavernous trap which enslaves and devours its victim. In fact, Evelyn suffers in the hands of Mother both as Evelyn and as Eve. Evelyn becomes Eve, he becomes she, yet this transformation is not consensual, neither is it peaceful. Evelyn becomes an unwilling guinea pig in Mother's distorted vision. Equipped with the two sets of breasts and a towering figure, Mother stands out as a larger than life character. Aytül Özüm also notes the monstrous quality of Mother, contending that "*Anne figürü, anlatıcının ifadesinde kendi kendini meydana getirmiş bir canavardır: mitlerde ve masallarda genel olarak temsil edilen biçiminin tersine bu anne tiptemesi canavardır ve elindeki silahlarla şiddet uygular*" [2009, p. 101] (Mother figure is a monster who created itself in the expression of the narrator: as opposed to its general representation in myths and fairy tales, this mother figure is a monster and inflicts violence with the weapons she has) (translation mine). She "mutilates" bodies instead of nurturing them, evidenced by her brutal operation on Evelyn. Evelyn narrates the surgical operation with

¹ In fact, disruption is a key word in understanding the narrative and thematic strategies of *The Passion of New Eve*; both the corporeality of characters and the fictional realm are constantly disrupted or presented in distorted ways so as to draw attention to how one's perception of them is contingent. Violence, then, is used as a means to underline and highlight such constructedness.

such precision that its violent annihilation of him seems grotesque: “*Raising her knife, she brought it down. She cut off my genital appendages with a single blow, caught them in her other hand and tossed them to Sophia, who slipped them into her shorts*” [Carter, 1982, p. 70–71]. Mother ruptures the continuity/organic unity of Evelyn’s mind and body: his corporeality is severely disrupted when he is forcefully turned into a woman. In addition to the physical surgery, Evelyn is also subjected to what Mother calls a “*psycho-surgery*” [Carter, 1982, p. 68] in Beulah. In her re-programming of Evelyn as Eve, Mother resorts to giving examples from other cultures as to how women have faced violence, yet she ironically leaves out her own violent treatment of Evelyn:

She told me how the Ancient Chinese had crippled their women’s feet; the Jews had chained the ankles of their women together; and the Indians ordered widows to immolate themselves on the pyres of their husbands. [...] hour after hour was devoted to the relation of horrors my old sex perpetrated on my new one. [Carter, 1982, p. 73]

It bears repeating that although Evelyn is a victim of violence in the hands of Mother and later of Zero, he himself is the inflictor of violence, which is evident in his relationship with Leilah. This relationship is marked by violent sexual games and infliction of pain – physical and psychological. In fact, this is a recurring theme in the novel. In a reversal of fortune, then, Evelyn is hoist with his own petard.

Although she also undergoes a mental reprogramming, he cannot fully embrace this new self: in fact, he keeps referring to himself/herself in the third person instead of using the first person pronoun I. This reluctance or refusal to accept the newly acquired femininity is significant in that it marks the rupture – literal and metaphorical – through which Evelyn is forced to become a woman. This rupture also underscores the contingency of gender identity, and in this case, even sexual identity.

Eve/lyn finally manages to escape the mad laboratory of Mother only to be captured by Women “*who spoke no language [she] understood*” [Carter, 1982, p. 84]. When she tries to free herself from them by biting their “*wrists and fingers, they slapped [her] face, to silence [her]*” [Carter, 1982, p. 84]. Thus, Eve’s first encounter with these women always already points at a reciprocal violence. However, these women are not the real source of violence but a reflection of Zero’s brutal degradation of women in general.

If Mother is a force to be reckoned with due to her oversized, overexaggerated physique and personality, Zero is as larger than life as her, because he is the epitome of the parodic representation of male supremacy and misogyny in the novel. He believes that he is deprived of procreative powers because of a movie star called Tristessa. He has a harem full of women whom he treats as less-than-animals beings, denying them the right to speak “properly” and forcing them instead to grunt and howl like animals. He is violent in his treatment of the women of his harem. Zero not only violates these women physically but, what is more important, psychologically, leading them to believe that they deserve this kind of treatment they receive from Zero. Despite his violent approach, these women “*loved him and did not think they were fit to pick up the crumbs from his table*” [Carter, 1982, p. 85]. The ready acceptance of these women of the supposed supremacy

of Zero is important because it makes Zero's obsession with Tristessa even more ironic. Zero's fury against Tristessa is a culmination of his inability (or reluctance) to find fault in himself for his shortcomings. When he finally does find Tristessa's safe haven in the middle of the desert, his reaction is as gruesome and violent as it can get. But more interestingly, his harem also mimics his loathing to the point that they trash Tristessa's house although they should not have anything against Tristessa. Yet, their behavior shows how successful Zero is in erasing these women's personalities and inserting his own twisted ideas and ideals in their minds.

Zero's treatment of Eve is rather reminiscent of Evelyn's treatment of Leilah. The first time Zero encounters Eve, he rapes her so violently that Eve cannot sit straight or function for a while.² Just like the description of the surgery, the depiction of the rape is given in gory details, highlighting the violent nature of the act: "*I was in no way prepared for the pain: his body was an anonymous instrument of torture, mine my own rack. My nostrils were filled with the rank stench of his sweat and his come*" [Carter, 1982, p. 86]. This turns to be just the first of many incidents to follow. Eve acknowledges that she "*spent three months as a wife of Zero. It was as savage an apprenticeship in womanhood as could have been devised for me*" [Carter, 1982, p. 107] Referring to how her suffering in the hands of Zero may be a retribution for his past "crimes" as a man, she draws our attention to the parallelism between herself and Zero:

Each time, a renewed defloration, as if his violence perpetually refreshed my virginity. And more than my body, some other yet equally essential part of my being was ravaged by him for, when he mounted me with his single eye blazing like the mouth of an automatic [...] I felt myself to be, not myself but he; and the experience of this crucial lack of self, which always brought with it a shock of introspection, forced me to know myself as a former violator at the moment of my own violation. [Carter, 1982, p. 101–102]

This is a crucial remark because it evidently underlines how the victim and perpetrator, the violator and the violated are intricately and irresolutely intertwined in *The Passion of New Eve*. In fact, it can be argued that Carter takes great pains to show how these positions can be occupied by anyone at any given time, regardless of their sex, gender, age, or social standing.

Zero's propensity for violence is underscored not only in his treatment of Eve and his other wives, but also in his obvious preference for weapons: "*He loved guns almost as much as he cherished misanthropy and spent several hours each afternoon shooting empty beer-cans from sticks driven into the ground on the patio of the ranch house*" [Carter, 1982, p. 85]. Such a depiction not only marks Zero's violent nature, but, more significantly, it underlines how Zero is indeed a caricature of conventional perceptions of a wild man. In Zero's character, then, Carter creates a two-dimensional man who represents all that is associated with patriarchy and men who conform to it. Merja Makinen likewise notes that "*Carter's fiction criticizes patriarchal systems but more significantly,*

² Evelyn may not have raped Leilah, but his treatment of her was no better than Zero's treatment of women.

especially her later fiction concentrates on “mocking and exploding the constrictive cultural stereotypes” [Makinen, 1992, p. 3].

Eve’s experience with Zero makes it possible for the readers to compare and contrast the behaviors of Evelyn – Eve’s “past” – and Zero, especially in terms of how they relate to and treat women. Just as the desert serving as a foil to New York, Zero becomes the foil for Evelyn. Not only is their treatment of women is highly violent, but they are also both obsessed with Tristessa, a film star from the silent movie era. She lives in the desert just like Mother and Zero; but her space in the desert serves as a safe haven for Tristessa until it is destroyed by Zero’s harem. Tristessa plays the role of the helpless, suffering victim in her movies. At the beginning of the novel Evelyn remarks how she has been the star in the movie versions of *The Fall of the House of Usher* and *Othello*. She is the perfect example of how a female image can serve the male fantasy.³ In *The Passion of New Eve*, Tristessa fulfills this role in two ways: she is the epitome of a fragile, ethereal woman for Evelyn, and she represents the handmaiden of the devil for Zero. Neither of these men have the correct understanding of Tristessa. Conveniently, Tristessa in either man’s mind is indeed a character, an illusion, a façade, rather than the actual human being that is to be found in the desert later in the text by Zero and his harem.

The eventual showdown between Zero and Tristessa proves to be fatal. Indeed, this encounter is the perfect example of how space and violence can be thought of in relation to one another. Zero’s women may have destroyed Tristessa’s home; but this destruction also has deadly consequences for Zero. The collapse of the structure of the house is again narrated in specific details, just as every other violent act that takes place throughout the narrative:

The air was full of flying glass and shattered furniture; the house was not spinning so fast the stagnant waters of the pool reflected only a glittering blur. [...] Cacophony. Above the mechanical clatter of the dissolution of the bizarre edifice, I could hear the terrified screeching of Zero and his harem; as the house whirled past, I saw them clinging helplessly to what spars of metal remained. [...] There was a mighty, tinkling, splashing crash as the denuded frame of steel plunged directly into the waters of the pool, sucking Zero the poet down, down with it, raising a dithering wave that broke upon our heads and streamed down our faces and tried to tug us after it as it swilled back towards its source [Carter, 1982, p. 139–141].

Liberated from the violent hands of Zero, Eve turns her gaze to her surroundings, and notices “the neglected park in which he [Tristessa] built his home” [Carter, 1982, p. 141]. Along with the depiction of the garden with its variety of plants and tree, Eve makes note of the remains of the struggle that killed Zero. In this section, Eve’s narrative fuses “the beautiful vegetation” [Carter, 1982, p. 142] with the “grotesque debris” [Carter, 1982, p. 142], thereby highlighting the contrarities prevalent in *The Passion of New Eve*. Nevertheless, the most overt duality remains to be represented through gender in the text.

³ A similar role is also played by Leilah at the beginning of *The Passion of New Eve*; Evelyn’s depiction of her is obviously “a parody of stereotypical male fantasies about women” [Gasiorek, 1995, p. 132].

Julie Sanders contends that “*Carter is fascinated by the constructed nature of social and gendered identity*” [Sanders, 2006, p. 119]. In her portrayal of Evelyn, Mother, Zero, Tristessa, and Leilah, Carter definitely works through this fascination. These characters not only become critiques of conventional gender identities, but they also point at how such conventions are far from being natural. Andrzej Gasiorek notes that “*The novel confronts the cultural iconography of our time, suggesting that its representations of gender are deceptions, shadow dances behind which lie complex structures of power*” [Gasiorek, 1995, p. 131]. In order to do so, Carter makes use of violence as a concept in its various forms, and plays upon dualities. Indeed, in *The Passion of New Eve*, Carter presents everything in an upside down, subverted manner, and every person and place has their “other” inscribed within. The characters stand as each other’s foils, and they also contain contrarities within their characterization. Mother, for example is nurturing but destructive. Zero is violent, which can be related to being active, yet he is unable to procreate because he is impotent, which can be related to being passive. Tristessa is a beauty symbol and is said to be the representation of perfect woman, but he is actually a man. Evelyn, of course, is the most obviously dual character in the text as he becomes Eve halfway through the narrative. However, his duality is not limited to the sex change; in fact, the more important duality – as far as the discussion in this paper is concerned – lies in the fact that he is both the victim and the perpetrator in the acts of violence throughout *The Passion of New Eve*. The same duality is discernible in the representations of New York and the desert, including Mother’s Beulah and Zero’s ranch. New York is the utmost urban space but it is presented in such a way that it turns into a post-apocalyptic wasteland that reeks of decay. The desert, which represents death for Evelyn and birth for Eve, contains three distinct spaces. Evelyn’s first impression of the desert marks it as inhabitable but it serves as a safe haven and an escape from the world for Tristessa. When it comes to Beulah, it is a combination of religion and science, innovation and mythology, the past and the present, reason and fancy. It is a place of recreation, but it also is the place where Evelyn’s corporeality as well as psychology is irresolutely disrupted. It is a religious space which is turned into a travesty of a science laboratory. Zero’s ranch, on the other hand, is where Eve becomes a married woman: marriage might be an occasion which can be conventionally celebrated, but Eve’s marriage is a travesty of the traditional happily-ever-after. Thus, every single character and every single place contains within itself its own negation and contradiction. This disruption to the seeming unity of the character and the place is highlighted through violence in *The Passion of New Eve*.

3. Conclusion

Instead of providing a documentary-like realistic narrative, *The Passion of New Eve* gives a surreal, magic realist one in which violence becomes a means of drawing a grotesque parody of contemporary society and the place of the human as gendered-beings within that society. Carter does not present violence in a grim and serious tone. Indeed, she depicts a parodic dystopia in which violence does not shock the reader as it

should because it is almost always counterbalanced by an absurdity or exaggeration. In other words, the narrative gets almost surreal especially in parts where a violent act is narrated, the suffering(s) of the character(s) do not create a cathartic release. It is this lack of “seriousness” that makes the text even more interesting.

Carter seems to be critical not only of the perpetrators, namely, Zero and Mother – and Evelyn in some cases, but also the so-called victims, that is, Zero’s women, Leilah, Eve, and Tristessa. Indeed, their victim status is not a stable position; rather, it oscillates between being the inflictor of pain and the one inflicted. In a way, violence is inscribed in all, not only in the obviously violent, but even within those who seem to be suffering under the violent acts of others. Last but not least, she makes use of space as a means of drawing attention to how these violent characters and their violent acts make sense within their given contexts. Moreover, violence is not only a physical manifestation, but it is evidently found in the discourses, stereotypes, and images we are immersed in. In *The Passion of New Eve*, Carter presents and re-presents violence to point at how contrarities are irresolutely coexisting and how conventional conceptualizations of gender fall short in understanding the complex relationships we build with ourselves and with others.

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