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Dark Humorous Mode in Anthropocene Fictions: A Contemporary Carnival of Victorian Grotesques in Liz Jensen's *Ark Baby*

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Abstract

Among various contemporary anthropogenic ecological threats and the entailing malfunctions in the planetary ecosystems that are featured in the Anthropocene, species extinction occupies a particularly critical position. Species extinction stands not only as a preeminent contemporary threat but also as an indicator of a more extensive underlying problem: the alarming level of the anthropogenic stressors on the planetary wellbeing. The inhabitants of a particular habitat (the whole planet, or just Britain, in the frame of this paper) would go extinct if only the wellbeing of their internal (the bodily systems) or external (the ecosystems) life supports are challenged. It is inevitable for any habitat loss and ecological degradation to eventually project on the inhabitants and challenge their wellbeing. In The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History, Elizabeth Kolbert (2014) heralds such an ecological challenge. Kolbert (2004) alarmingly reports that the Earth is on the brink of the sixth mass extinction incident recorded in the geological history of the planet. The outcomes of such an incident are unprecedented since the extinction of one biological species may trigger the extinction of many others. Thus, inhabiting a planet stormed by the threat of mass extinctions and trying to survive under continuous ecological distress, can be a daring endeavour for both humans and nonhumans. In the Anthropocene, the survival of humans -the so-called superior biological species- can be as challenging as the survival of any other nonhuman biological species. Within this framework, this essay will focus on the fictional portrayal of a planet (one country, to be more precise) suffering from human species' extinction and discuss the radical, mostly absurd, ways of recovery from and adaptation to it through illustrative examples from the British novelist Liz Jensen's Ark Baby (1998). Delving into the roots of humans' inclination to feel themselves superior to animals and treat them as others, this paper will discuss Jensen's fictional projections on a future constructed upon multispecies, hybrid-breed (of human and animal) entanglements illustrated through her adoption of an alternative literary style; resorting to humour in expressing serious Anthropocenic concerns.

Keywords: Liz Jensen, *Ark Baby*, the Anthropocene, dystopia, Cli-Fi, satire, species extinction, human-animal entanglements, grotesque

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the anthropogenic stressors on the planetary wellbeing. The inhabitants of a particular habitat (the whole planet, or just Britain, in the frame of this paper) would go extinct if only the wellbeing of their internal (the bodily systems) or external (the ecosystems) life supports are challenged. It is inevitable for any habitat loss and ecological degradation to eventually project on the inhabitants and challenge their wellbeing. In *The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History*, Elizabeth Kolbert (2014) heralds such an ecological challenge. Kolbert (2004) alarmingly reports that the Earth is on the brink of the sixth mass extinction incident recorded in the geological history of the planet. The outcomes of such an incident are unprecedented since the extinction of one biological species may trigger the extinction of many others. Thus, inhabiting a planet stormed by the threat of mass extinctions and trying to survive under continuous ecological distress, can be a daring endeavour for both humans and nonhumans. In the Anthropocene, the survival of humans -the so-called superior biological species- can be as challenging as the survival of any other nonhuman biological species. Within this framework, this essay will focus on the fictional portrayal of a planet (one country, to be more precise) suffering from human species' extinction and discuss the radical, mostly absurd, ways of recovery from and adaptation to it through illustrative examples from the British novelist Liz Jensen's *Ark Baby* (1998). Delving into the roots of humans' inclination to feel themselves superior to animals and treat them as others, this paper will discuss Jensen's fictional projections on a future constructed upon multispecies, hybrid-breed (of human and animal) entanglements illustrated through her adoption of an alternative literary style; resorting to humour in expressing serious Anthropocenic concerns.

Inspired by Alan Weisman's thrilling fantasy of a world without humans in *The World Without Us* (2007), Slavoj Zizek speculates on the desperation and paralysis felt by humans facing species extinction. Zizek asserts that "we, humans, are reduced to a pure disembodied gaze observing our own absence … witnessing the Earth itself retaining its pre-castrated state of innocence, before we humans spoiled it with our hubris" (part II, para. 2). In such critical moments characterized by the shock of the Anthropocene and the metaphorical stasis of humans who have experienced an ecological trauma of their own manufacture, literature assumes the active role of a descriptive as well as critical gaze. As the geological signals and the anthropogenic carbon prints stored in the rock strata compose the lithic strata of the Anthropocene, the fictional and non-fictional narratives inspired by the Anthropocene discourse similarly construct the literary strata of the Anthropocene. In parallel with the negative representations of the anthropos (human) as a global geological force capable of intervening into the internal mechanisms of planetary ecosystems and executing geologically epoch-changing alterations, the Anthropocene fictions predominantly portray life-threatening anthropogenic environmental transformations and herald a bitter future for the inhabitants of the Earth. Already exhausted with pessimistic, gloomy, apocalyptic and/or post-apocalyptic environmental projections, which are burdened with concerning (on scientifically proven, hence realistic grounds) futuristic portrayals and connotations, the literary reflections of the Anthropocene are usually as depressive as the scientific denotations of the concept itself. However, born in Oxfordshire into a Danish-Moroccan family, the British novelist Liz Jensen holds a unique position among the pessimistic eco-dystopian writers of the Anthropocene. In an attempt to change the prevailing depressive mode in ecological literature, in *Ark Baby*, Liz Jensen mixes the contrasting modes provided by two distinct literary genres; seriousness of dystopia and humorousness of comedy.

Crossing the discursive perimeters of the long-established anthropocentricism, Jensen's Anthropocene fiction *Ark Baby* aims to satirize anthropocentric mindsets and human hubris - currently disabled by the Anthropocene discourse - and reveal the vulnerability of the so-called superior human race when faced with environmental challenges. Humans' dethronement from their privileged hierarchical position and their re-positioning in a more egalitarian, biocentric

planetary order as just another biological species evokes the fall of an ancient tragic hero. Yet, through Jensen's unique literary style, the ecological fall of the contemporary tragic hero transcends the borderline of tragedy and enters the realm of comedy. The American ecocritic Joseph Meeker is a pioneering figure, who compares tragic and comic modes in environmental literature and suggests the applicability of comic modes into ecological narratives. Meeker's evaluation that "many of the environmental problems facing mankind today seem to be the products of mistaken human choices" (p. 163) evokes a stereotypical tragic hero's wrong choices and his pending fall. In a rehearsed expectation, the readers of the apocalyptic stories portraying ecological catastrophes would probably sink into their reading chairs and anticipate reading a dark story of an ecological doomsday. However, literature always preserves the possibility of surprising the reader. Approaching an eco-catastrophe in a humorous way is theoretically possible and contextually relevant. According to Meeker, "the [conventional] tragic literature and philosophy" undertake a particular task: "to demonstrate that man is equal or superior to his conflict" and, eventually, "affirm his [the tragic hero's] mastery and greatness in the face of his own destruction … [present] a triumphant image of what man can be" (p. 157). Unlike tragedy, which "demands that choices be made among alternatives; comedy assumes that all choice is likely to be in error and that survival depends upon finding accommodations that will permit all parties to endure" (Meeker, p.164). Since life itself is all about endurance in the face of conflicts, comedy arises from "the biological circumstances of life, [thus] unconcerned with cultural systems of morality" (Meeker, p. 157), the representations of which would appear ridiculous in a comic context. Meeker deduces that "if comedy is essentially biological, it is possible that biology is also comic" (p. 160). For Meeker humour is an "essential ingredient in the formation of intraspecific bonds" (p. 160). Thus, humour can be utilized to highlight the "phylogenetic basis in many animals as well as in man" (Meeker, p. 160). This approach brings literature and biology closer. Evolution, being one of the interests of biology, thus, provides a prolific thematic issue for comic literature:

> Evolution itself is a gigantic comic drama, not the bloody tragic spectacle imagined by the sentimental humanists of early Darwinism. […] Evolution does not proceed through battles fought among animals to see who is fit enough to survive and who is not. Rather, the evolution process is one of the adaptation and accommodation, with the various species exploring opportunistically their environments in search of a means to maintain their existence. Like comedy, evolution is a matter of muddling through. Literary comedy and biological evolution share in common the view that all change is conservative. Organisms and comic heroes change their structure or behaviour only in order to preserve an accustomed way of life which has been threatened by changes in the environment. (Meeker, p. 164-165)

As Meeker suggests in this quotation, evolution is an indispensable fact of life, and the survival of human in the Anthropocene depends on "man's [humans] ability to change himself [themselves] rather than his [their] environment" (p. 168). In other words, it is a matter of changing environmental perception. In the Anthropocene context, the conflicts faced by humans are transformed into the forces of nature as well as the ecological threats, yet the survival instinct of the tragic hero is preserved. Unlike tragedy, the strategy of comedy for the resolution of conflicts is seeing "life as a game" (Meeker, p. 168). Thus, adopting a comic approach to the environmental challenges does not necessarily require or propose the destruction [at least one] of the opposing forces, but a possible reconciliation between them.

Ark Baby can be interpreted as a fictional representation of such a reconciliation; a metaphorical coupling between the human destroyer and the destroyed nonhuman, the parallel biological evolution and/or regression of human and animal, and a possible trigger of a "symbiogenesis" in Harawayan sense (p.25), in which "beings -human and not- become with each other … in

every scale and register of time and stuff in symbiopoietic tangling, in earthly worldling and unworldling" (Haraway, p. 45). So, perceived from a comic perspective, the tragic ecological fall of human is treated by Jensen as a literary opportunity opening up to new possibilities and unconventional human-nonhuman encounters in her novel. The dark humorous tone adopted by Jensen in *Ark Baby* is achieved through such unconventional encounters: Her exaggerated, caricaturized and grotesque portrayals of the ecologically challenged humans - in the exemplary case of the Brits suffering from sterility - and the fringe solutions that *"Homo* Brittannicus" (Jensen, p.43) produces to cope with their problem of species extinction, such as raising pet-apes as substitutes for unborn babies and considering human-animal couplings to overcome the ongoing fertility crisis.

Bi-temporal Plotline of *Ark Baby*:

The plotline of the novel, swings between the parallel timespans of 1845 and 2005. Fictionally converging two centuries (Victorian Britain of the nineteenth century and the contemporary Britain of the twenty-first century), Jensen seemingly overcomes the temporal and spatial restraints, which have crippled the realistic ecological narratives attempting to portray the scale, range, and possible outcomes of anthropogenic environmental transformations. Being a crossroad of contesting ideas, the nineteenth century was particularly chosen. It is the period that hosts the evolutionary scientific theories regarding the appearance of the earliest life-forms on Earth and the evolution of species through a process of adaptation to the environmental conditions. It is also the period in which, due to rapid industrialisation, the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmospheric compositions remarkably accelerated, thus, into which the onset of the Anthropocene is chronologically pinned by Eugene Stoermer and Paul Crutzen (p. 17), the introducers of the concept of the Anthropocene. The nineteenth century is also a period of Victorian Britain renowned for conservatism, repression of sexuality and explicit morality. Although for many cultural historians, Victorian age was "traditionally British" (Mundler, 2010, 63) on many levels, it was a globally significant period acting as the scientific nexus of radical discoveries. Examining the reasons behind Neo-Victorian writers' desire to revisit Victorian age in contemporary works, Helen E. Mundler underlines three motives: the desire to revisit a period which was relatively "better" -with less ecological, nuclear, etc. threats- (p.63), "to relive the challenge of mankind's rise to modernity" (p. 63), and "to mock a bygone age whose values are easily parodied" (p. 63). Seemingly, the third motive fits better into the scope of this paper since *Ark Baby* provides prolific illustrations for a parody of Victorian morality, of Darwinian theory of entangled origin of species and the evolutionary course of life on Earth, and of the outcomes of the anthropogenic environmental stressors [the threat of species extinction]. Considering the publication date of the novel, 1998, the year 2005 is chosen by Liz Jensen to refer to a dystopic near future in which the reader can observe the outcomes of the Anthropocene.

The bi-temporal - connecting two centuries - and metatextual - composed of various intertextual references to the earlier narratives as well as the critiques of them - structure of *Ark Baby* not only parodies but also humorously documents the referenced incidents and/or narratives and the popular responses to them. The biblical story of Noah's Ark and the end of humanity, the futuristic stories based on the scientists' assumptions about the future of Planet Earth as well as the scientific explanations about the origins of life on Earth, and the subtle references to the local myths and urban legends circulating among the Brits for ages can be regarded as the examples of such narratives in the novel. Jensen's parodies *in Ark Baby* are underpinned by various cross-temporal references stretching from the nineteenth century to the twenty-first century. They provide relevant textual materials to explore the crossovers between science and religion, human and animal, established norms and revolutionary novelties.

When the novel opens in 2005, Britain has been swept by a "Fertility Crisis." From the New Year's Day of 2000 onwards, when the world entered the Millennium, "there hasn't been a single natural conception" (Jensen, p. 42). So, Britain has been suffering from sterility for the last five years. At first, this unfortunate situation was called a "Fertility Blip" (Jensen, p. 43), a descriptive phrase suggesting an abrupt and hopefully short-term glitch which will be overcome in no time. After thorough investigations about the cause of the crisis, it becomes clear that what is affected is not the male sperm, but only the female eggs. Luckily, but misogynistically, "there was nothing wrong with the British sperm" (Jensen, p. 43). In accordance with Jensen's absurd plotline, an absurd solution is proposed for the problem of sterility. Arranged marriages are organised and foreign women are imported to Britain. Yet, soon a more terrifying condition is revealed: Flocks of foreign women arrive in Britain, but no new pregnancies are materialized. Jensen narrates how the disappointed Brits accept the fact that

> [n]ature has played its wild card; their [the imported women's] eggs seemed to have died as soon as they passed Customs. The whole country was an egg-killing zone. A nation of ovarian doom. The quickie divorces followed, and the Sperm Drain began. The tourist industry collapsed completely, and overnight, we became a third-world leper colony. Europe poured millions of Euros into fertility research, but was desperate to get shot of us. (p. 43)

Even the frozen eggs in "the Egg Bank" are only half per cent viable. The British authorities cannot provide any solution to the scarcity of healthy female eggs. Fearing that the male population's sperms may be similarly affected, emigration restrictions for men become an issue in topical formal discussions. Eventually, "*Homo Brittannicus*" (Jensen, p. 43) comes to the brink of extinction.

The protagonist of the 2005 part of the novel is Bobby Sullivan, who runs a veterinarian clinic during the Fertility Crisis. In the fifth year of the infertility, the proposed solutions become more and more absurd. In the absence of real babies, British women begin to adopt and raise monkeys. Various types of monkeys, which were once kept as pets, now are re-purposed as child substitutes. Primates are the most popular type of monkeys adopted by the infertile British women. "Since the Fertility Crisis," states vet Sullivan, "primate owners were 92 per cent female" (Jensen, 1998, p. 6). The infertile millennium women in Britain treat primates as if they were human beings. For the sake of caricaturising animal anthropomorphism, Jensen even pushes her post-catastrophic portrayals to the extremes. For instance, the owners of the primates get their newly adopted nonhuman-babies dressed up as if they were their biological daughters and sons, and the couples fight over their custody rights. For example, to escape the legal punishment for euthanising a monkey, which is anthropomorphically named as Giselle, without the consent of the real owner, Bobby Sullivan escapes from London. Sullivan settles in a fictional small northern town, Thunder Spit, and starts a new life under a different name, Buck de Savile. In Thunder Spit, once Bobby, now Buck, he discovers his genetic connections with Tobias Phelps, who is the protagonist of the Victorian part of the novel. Tobias is the foster son of the Phelps (Parson Phelps and his wife), who will find out his biological parents and discover his half-human half-animal hybrid identity through the course of the novel. The bodily deformities that Tobias is genetically inherited from his yet unidentified parents become increasingly visible as he grows up. Anatomically, Tobias embodies both human and animal parts. His otherwise standard human outlook is distorted by some beastly features: an unusually hairy body, a weirdly formed foot, which looks like an orthopaedic deformity but actually an animal foot, and finally, and most strikingly, a tail, actually the leftover half of a tail. The genetic causes behind these bodily deformities - or Tobias's beastly inheritance, if you like - are revealed by the sudden appearance of his biological mother; the Contortionist lady who works as acrobat at "the Travelling Fair of Danger." It seems that Tobias is the fruit of a weird

human-animal coupling: a human mother and a primate father. To recover from the shock of his genetic roots, Tobias leaves Thunder Spit and his foster parents behind (Parson Phelps retires into a sanatorium for the spiritually disturbed) and starts a new life in London. He gets married to Violet Scrapie, who truly loves Tobias despite his monstrosity, and the couple pursue a relatively tranquil life till Tobias's father-in-law Dr. Ivanhoe Scrapie discovers Tobias's genetic heritage and with occupational wonder and excitement, gets burned with the desire of inspecting Tobias. The second half of the novel revisits 2005 to unfold how the story, as well as the genetic lineage, of Tobias Phelps and Bobby Sullivan is merged. Evidently, Bobby Sullivan descends from the *humanimal* genetic lineage started by Tobias and Violet centuries ago. Seemingly, the town Thunder Spit has been acting as the cradle of *humanimal* generations for centuries. Unlike his blood relative Tobias Phelps who escaped from Thunder Spit to London, Bobby Sullivan follows the reverse route to arrive in Thunder Spit, where he will not only discover his genetic roots but also get involved in a romantic relationship with the Simian-twins Rose and Blanche Ball. This unusual affair results in Tobias' siring human-animal hybrid babies, who happen to be the first babies born since the Fertility Crisis began. Eventually, the endangered genetic future of the British people is absurdly saved through the coupling of human-animal hybrids.

The Carnivalesque Menagerie of Victorian Grotesques in *Ark Baby*

Re-conceptualizing Darwinian assertion of "the survival of the fittest," hybrids, who are thought to be more resilient and more easily adapting to the changing environmental conditions, save humans from extinction. However, the carnivalesque menagerie of characters in *Ark Baby* do not only cherish hybridity and diversity, but also draw connections between the fictional characters in the novel and the important personages and incidents of the nineteenth century. For example, the cruise ship travelling the world, *The HMS Beagle* is also the ship that Darwin makes his explorations. Touched by Jensen, this ship -reminding the real one by association- hosts eccentric fictional characters, such as Jacques-Yves Cabillaud. Interestingly, Jacques-Yves Cabillaud, the eccentric cook of the ship, develops an exotic cuisine and coins the descriptive term *Cuisine Zoologique* to describe this particular cuisine. What is peculiar about *Cuisine Zoologique* is Cabillaud's culinary usage of the meat of the unusual animals as well as the leftover internal parts of the castrated animals stuffed by the taxidermist Dr. Scrappie. During this odd journey, the cook Cabillaud discovers that "emu, iguana, finch, snake, some of the ugliest and humblest of God's creatures […] could with the appropriate garnishes be a culinary delight" (Jensen, p. 32). Cabillaud will, later on, be assigned to cook for a Celebration of Evolution Banquet in honour of Charles Darwin at Buckingham Palace.

Besides its associations of Darwin's ship, Jensen's fictional ship also evokes an ark. Yet, Jensen's ark is odd enough to host grotesque farers. Through another character, Dr. Ivanhoe, who is a taxidermist assigned by Her Majesty Queen Victoria to travel the world, find exotic species, and stuff them for her private animal collection Jensen satirizes the Victorian morality, conservatism as well as the weirdness of Queen Victoria's personal interests. Queen Victoria strictly orders the taxidermist Dr. Scrapie to castrate the animals before stuffing: "In keeping with all animals destined for her Royal Highness's Animal Kingdom Collection, its genitalia must be excised completely; as a double measure of prudery, the creature will also, later be clad in custom-sewn breeches" (Jensen, p. 28). Moreover, upon Queen Victoria's command, the stuffed animals' skins were stretched to give particular positions; "a sentimental position chosen by the Queen" herself (Jensen, p. 28). This position was also religiously convenient since "the creature is to stand upright, Victoria has commanded, with its paws together as though at prayer" (Jensen, p. 28). As the last proof of the poor creature's prudery,

> the Monarch has commanded Scrapie to endow the beast with eyes that are 'blue, a sort of eggshell blue' […] But, she had specified, 'somewhat larger than the normal for a bear of this kind, which should we feel, be gazing Heaven-ward as though in holy contemplation.' The idea being to transform the bear into a sort of noble, brutish creature of piety, fit to join the growing ranks of beasts in her whimsical bestiary; a whole Arkful of stuffed and de-sexed mammals, absurdly clothed, and in the posture of religious maniacs. (Jensen, p. 28)

The ship is indeed occupied by grotesque human and nonhuman characters. Almost all grotesque figures imaginable are on board. On land, grotesque figures are swarming too: The Contortionist lady, the Frozen Woman, the Man-Eating Wart-hog who have been touring the country with "the Traveling Fair of Danger," even half man-half monkey Tobias Phelps, the Ball twins breastfeeding their half-breed humanimal babies, humans adopting baby-substitutes, anthropomorphic macaques named after humans and dressing up like humans, etc.

The human-animal hybrid characters who are literally interpreted by Jensen as grotesque figures can also be found in evolutionary theories produced in the nineteenth century. Though the appearance of the earliest life forms on Earth, and the genetic past and future of humans in particular have always been a wonder for science, the nineteenth century was particularly prolific for scientifically theorizing the biological origin of species and problematizing the position of humans among other nonhuman biological species. In *Ark Baby*, Jensen deploys the nineteenth century theories of Charles Darwin on evolution of species and natural selection in the Anthropocene context. Various Victorian details are revisited and integrated into contemporary settings in a similar manner of postmodern pastiche. For instance, renowned Victorian locations such as the Galapagos, where Charles Darwin made observations on species in the nineteenth century, is parodically incarnated in *Ark Baby* as the small northern town Thunder Spit. Moreover, Tobias Phelps epitomizes Darwin's hypothesis on human beings' descendance from apes. Dr. Scrapie recognizes the anatomical resemblance between Tobias and a kind of extinct primate from Morocco which is known as "the Gentleman Monkey." Dr. Scrapie describes the Gentleman Monkey as a "strikingly humanoid" unusual specimen with "a larger brain than man's," "highly intelligent," "polygamous by nature and a fructivore, but in other respects remarkably similar in many ways to the human," "child-like but courteous by nature; that's why they called him the Gentleman" (p. 277). The carnivalesque menagerie of such cross-temporal fictional characters accords with the grotesque pictorial representations in *Ark Baby*. These human-animal encounters are also suggestive of various entanglements beyond Darwin's nineteenth century anticipations.

Hybridity and Human-Animal Entanglements in *Ark Baby*

Human-animal entanglements occupy the heart of *Ark Baby*, both thematically and theoretically feeding the novel. All the major human characters experience the reversals of their fortunes following and/or due to various encounters with animals. For example, Tobias's biological mother conceived Tobias after her sexual encounter with a humanoid primate, who mistakenly made her think that she has been sleeping with a human. But darkness hides the beastly figure of the Gentleman Monkey. In addition to this story revealing the details behind Tobias's humanimal hybrid-breeding, Tobias experiences a second change of fortune due to just another human-animal encounter. When he was a baby, Tobias lost his original tail to a bite of the Man Eating Wart-hog, who was being kept in the fair for entertaining the audience. Tobias never recovered from the trauma of this attack. Similarly, Parson Phelps lost his sexual potency after being attacked by a snake. Other characters in the novel have also weird encounters with animals. For example, Violet's father Dr. Scrapie was a taxidermist obsessed with weird and extinct animal species. As an occupational hazard posed by the father, Violet and her mother

once accidentally ate the meat of monkey [the Gentleman Monkey], which almost caused them to be poisoned due to the toxic material injected to the animal before it was cooked. Later on, Violet gets married to the half-breed Tobias. Bobby Sullivan descends from the lineage of Tobias Phelphs, hence inherited his hybrid genes, and sires humanimal hybrid children. From this perspective, even the places referred in the novel bear animal connotations. For instance, Thunder Spit is "a peninsula in the shape of a herring, its tail nailed to the mainland, head straining out to the sea" (16). So, in *Ark Baby*, human and animal biological species are already genetically, socially, and genealogically enmeshed, and illustrate a future constructed upon human-nonhuman symbiosis.

Though human characters' embracing their animality is promoted as a peaceful resolution at the end of the novel, human-animal entanglements actually pose problematic symbiotic zones. Tobias rejects his monstrous animality for years, hides his nonhuman bodily features from the othering gazes. When Tobias finally takes courage in hands and decides to reveal his genetic origins to his beloved Violet, he honestly explains how he feels about his humanimality: "[i]n my heart, I am a man. […] I was born a half-breed and I do not deny it. In fact I can say now […] I am proud of my uniqueness. But monkey though I am, I was raised to be a man" (p. 329). With his final confession, which evokes Jacques Derrida's "the being-with shared by man and by what man calls the animal" (p. 393), Tobias embraces the animality in him without denying his humanity. He was treated as the other for a long time due to his animal sides, which he proudly embraces now. For Derrida, the distinct categorisation of human and animal is a linguistic powerplay, one of many ways that humans exercise superiority. To Derrida, "the animal is a word, an appellation that men have instituted, a name they have given themselves the right and the authority to give to another living creature (p. 392). The separating line between the categories of human and animal, us and them, act as a linguistic backdrop enabling humans to impose sovereignty upon more-than-human worlds through their control over language. In "The Animal That Therefore I am," Derrida elaborates on the use of language as an instrument for humans' subjugation of animals claiming "men would be first and foremost those living creatures who have given themselves the word that enables them to speak of the animal with a single voice and to designate it as the single being that remains without a response, without a word with which to respond" (p. 400). If Tobias's animality is noticed by other humans, he is afraid of falling into a sub-category. So, his voice would be dubbed by humans, and his humanity would be lost to his animality.

This othering process, which began long time ago, caused the treatment of animals primarily as subordinates ready to be harnessed through various activities, such as "hunting, fishing, domestication, training, or traditional exploitation of animal energy" (Derrida, p. 394) in transportation, agricultural and mining activities. However, in the nineteenth century, the perception about animals began to change. In the course of the last two centuries, unfair treatments towards animals have been "turned upside down by the joint developments of zoological, ethological, biological and genetic forms of knowledge" (Derrida, p. 394). Darwin's theories on the origin of species is one of the scientific contributors to the perceptive transformation mentioned by Derrida. Raising fundamental questions about the origin of life and decentring humans from their privileged positions among all biological species once inhabited and currently inhabiting the Earth, Darwinian theories brought a new perspective not only to evolutionary biology but also to philosophy. It was Charles Darwin who underlined the environmental stressors as a factor determining the future of biological species and who presented the surviving species as the descendants of the extinct species, and thus he suggested the interconnectedness of life and death. Instead of accepting the presupposition that all species were "created together at the beginning of time, or even at punctuated intervals through time," Darwin argues that "the present array of kinds [of species] throughout the world had come into

being by a gradual process of genetic differentiation and selection under environmental pressures" (p. vii).

However, when the British biologist and natural historian Charles Robert Darwin shared his radical theories on the evolution of biological species for the first time with the nineteenth century people in *On the Origin of the Species* published on 24 November 1859, he received diverse responses. Being one of the most ground-breaking studies not only of the nineteenth century but of all times, his book was welcomed with high acclaim as well as attracted serious condemnation in the religious circles, In the nineteenth century part of *Ark Baby*, the negative reactions to Darwin's publication, especially among the clergy - represented by Tobias's foster father Parson Phelps - is vividly portrayed. In *Ark Baby*, Darwin's book, which suggests the idea that "we [humans] were descended from monkeys and apes" (Jensen, p. 139), is referred as "ungodly" (p. 139), hence capable of making many theologians fall "into melancholy and madness" (Jensen, p. 139). Represented by Darwin, science is particularly accused of being "a vehicle of destruction" (Jensen, p. 139) of the god's order. Thus, Darwin's recently published research is interpreted in the religious circles as "the last straw in a long and uncivilised barrage of assault upon the Lord's word" (Jensen, p. 139). Shortly after its publication, Parson Phelps brings a copy of the infamous book to the church, publicly rips out the cover, tears out its pages and ardently warns his congregation about the perilous content of it. Thanks to Parson Phelps's stormy sermons, Charles Darwin, who was a total stranger to all Thunder Spitters so far, becomes "such an object of public contempt in the village that he replaced Guy Fawkes in the effigy on Bonfire Night" (Jensen, p. 140). What is frustrating in Darwin's theories particularly for the clergy is their way of challenging the long-established Christian doctrines. As narrated in the Bible, "the Earth had been without form, and void, and darkness had been upon the face of the deep! And then the man appeared" (Jensen, p. 140). But, Charles Darwin, a heretic in the eye of the clergy, has dared to challenge the words of God in *Genesis*, and attempted to scientifically re-write the myth of creation. Declaring the probability that all organic beings which have ever inhabited the Earth have descended from "one primordial form, into which life was first breathed" **(**Depew, p. 241), Darwin paved the way for a new conception of life as descending from one single source, and all life forms being variations of it.

Tobias Phelps was a young man when Darwin's revolutionary ideas were in the air. For young Tobias, Mr. Darwin was making three dangerous propositions: "God's word in the Book of Genesis was a lie, All life -including human life -developed by a gradual haphazard process of evolution, from basic, humble life-forms such as the sardine, and that man himself was by implication but a glorified baboon. That our faith and my father's life's work was as nought" (Jensen, p. 141). So, scientifically, there is no distinction between a sardine, a baboon and a human! As Darwin's hypothesis pinpoints a single source as the origin of all biological species, it also paves the way to the probability of humans' descend from primates. Scientific invalidation of the theological explanations about the origins of life on Earth and the fear of interconnectedness between the so-called superior human and the so-called inferior nonhuman animal were confusing for all Victorians, who were not willing to lose their title of God's *magnum opus*. Thus, Darwin's theories were seen as scientifically revolutionary, theologically blasphemous, socially perplexing, and philosophically controversial.

Even today, the contemporary scientific discussions on the possible affinities between organisms continue to cause ontological confusions. The issue attracts particular attention of the Posthumanities. For instance, Timothy Morton discusses the various echoes of such an inter-species connection which can be interpreted either as "an unbearable intimacy with others" (p. 265) or having "a humiliating descent" (p. 265). Stormed by the long-lasting evolutionary processes underpinned by the theories of Copernicus, Marx, Darwin and Freud, humans are now "decentred beings" (Morton, p. 265). In its most basic sense, evolution suggests that all

life forms are derived from other life forms. So, life itself must be a symbiotic process. Thus, Morton asserts, drawing clear distinctions between lifeforms prevailing over Earth is impossible, and differentiating between biological species is "never absolute" (p. 268). Even within this larger framework, the interspecies categorizations are still problematic. Yet, unlike the nineteenth century antagonists of Darwin, as a representative of the twenty-first century logic, Timothy Morton interprets Darwinian evolutionary theories as proofs of "ecological interdependence" (p. 265). In *On the Origin of Species,* Darwin uses the analogy of the Tree of Life to represent the affinities of all the beings - regardless of being alive or extinct - of the same class:

> The green and budding twigs may represent existing species; and those produced during each former year may represent the long succession of extinct species … From the first growth of the tree, many a limb and branch have decayed and dropped off; and these lost branches of various sizes may represent those whole orders, families, and genera which have now no living representatives, and which are known to us only from having been found in a fossil state … As buds give rise by growth to fresh buds, and these, if vigorous, branch out and overtop on all sides many a feebler branch, so by generation I believe it has been with the great Tree of Life, which fills with its dead and broken branches the crust of the earth, and covers the surface with its ever branching and beautiful ramifications. (Darwin, p. 99-100)

Morton revisits Darwin's abovementioned biblical evocation of the Great Tree of Life, which stands for the overall processes of life to elaborate on his ideas on the ecological interdependence between all organisms. Morton suggests that even the dead life forms are strictly entangled with life since they help new life forms come into existence as described in the analogy. Dead and broken branches drop down on the soil and transform into nutrient for the new life forms. According to Morton, Darwin's theories of evolution demonstrate how all categories regarding Earthly forms of life "collapse into one another" (p. 272), and produce innately hybrid biological and genetical variations.

In this respect, the grotesque and monstrous formations exemplified by Jensen in *Ark Baby* through such characters as Tobias Phelps, Bobby Sullivan, his humanimal babies, who are the descendants of the human-ape hybrid lineage, collectively epitomize Morton's "strange strangers" (p. 275). Morton describes his coinage "strange strangers" as follows:

> Their familiarity is strange, and their strangeness is familiar. Strange strangers are unique, utterly singular. They cannot be thought as part of a series (such as species or genus) without violence. Yet their uniqueness is not such that they are utterly independent. They are composites of other strange strangers. We share their DNA, their cell structure, subroutines in the software of their brains. They are absolutely unique and so capable of forming a collective of life forms, rather than a community. (p. 277)

Thus, the biological familiarity as well as the ontological and categorical strangeness between species should not be taken as an excuse for othering, as observed in some parts of *Ark Baby*, but as a reason to celebrate diversity.

Re-interpreting Darwinian Evolution in the Anthropocene

Given the Anthropocenic challenges humans and nonhumans face and their unprecedented outcomes, evolution in the Anthropocene has slightly changed its character and began producing complex, resilient, "self-reproducing entities that have repeatedly managed to change, survive, and proliferate despite major ecological upheavals" (Shapiro, p.147). In this

regard, evolution is "life's way of dealing with the unpredictable" (Shapiro, p. 147). In the twenty-first century, biological evolution is treated not only as one of the central foci of science but also as a metaphor and a symbolic model for the non-scientific fields of study like Environmental Humanities. As James Alan Shapiro underlines, "the science of the 21st century deals with the interactions between the multiple components of complex systems" ranging from "atoms, molecules, organisms, ecosystems, climates, galaxies, black holes, or universes" (p. 145). The main focus of scientific inquiries is still trying "to understand how systems change over time" (Shapiro, p.145).

To the interest of the Environmental Humanities scholars, ongoing ecological threats in the Anthropocene not only require ontological redefinitions regarding humans and nonhumans but also literally reshape human and nonhuman corporeality. The Anthropocene features particular environmental conditions capable not of transforming the environment but also of human corporeality and its bodily systems. As Patricia Yaeger states describing the modern Narcissus and discussing the re-interpretation of the ancient myth of Narcissus as a toxic embodiment in contemporary ecological setting, today "human is not situated in a natural environment, he is his environment" (p. 323). Thus, Darwin's concept of the survival of the fittest, under present conditions, requires organisms to develop skills of adaptation to the toxic environments they inhabit. In order to survive, their bodies learn to live in toxicity. For instance, in *Ark Baby*, Bobby Sullivan's cottage in the Thunder Spit of 2005 overlooks the contaminated River Flid. Sullivan describes the toxicity in the river as follows:

> [A] few years back, the Flid had won The Pollution Challenge Award, but looking at it now you got the sense that it was no longer a contender. From time to time … it [the river] would bear a batch of foamy-scummed fish, which he refered to as 'eels flottantes'. There was a chemical factory at Fishforth, fisty miles upstream, specializing in detergents. Sometimes the water frothed violet, like some extravagant technicolour cartoon. (p. 102-3)

Disturbingly, the inhabitants of Thunder Spit are indifferent to the environmental degradation around. Sullivan, in a similar indifference, speculates on the adaptation to toxicity as follows:

> It didn't really matter any more, how much we screwed up the earth, I thought. Or at least our part of it. The rest of Europe will probably use the whole island as a nuclear dumping ground, once we're gone [referring to the ongoing Fertility Crisis]. And who can blame them? … I reckon urban man must have evolved lungs that needed a certain degree of environmental contamination. I experienced positive withdrawal symptoms during my first week in Thunder Spit, and felt quite nostalgic when I caught a whiff of exhaust. The air as well as being cleaner than in Tooting Bec [London], was a couple of degrees colder, and it took my nose awhile to detect any smells at all. (p. 102-103)

The humans living in the Anthropocene evolve into toxic bodies, and environmental contamination becomes a part of their bodily systems. Seemingly, anthropogenic contamination and environmental degradation are dramatically normalized.

Conclusion

Re-interpreting the nineteenth century theories of evolution from a contemporary literary perspective, Liz Jensen pulls a Posthumanist story of creation featuring hybrid species out of an apocalyptic Anthropocene myth of eschatology, in which human race was about to go extinct due to anthropogenic perils. Jensen's updated Posthumanist story of creation cherishes hybridity and diversity, and yet it is uncanny. In *When Species Meet* (2008), Donna Haraway

warns us about the uncanny outcomes of the human-animal encounters asserting that "encounterings do not produce harmonious wholes, and smoothly preconstituted identities do not ever meet in the first place … [yet, such] meetings make us who and what we are in the avid contact zones that are the world. Once 'we' have met, we can never be 'the same' again" (p. 287). At the end of the novel, watching his newborn humanimal hybrids breastfed as their little tails twitching in happiness, Bobby Sullivan's tears of joy stream down on his face. Though grotesque, this is the portrayal of a brave-new future which is worth to watch: "This is the future said the ghostly voice of the Laudanum Empress. Do your best to deserve it" (Jensen, p. 335). In Jensen's biocentric fictional world, the human-nonhuman hybrid babies who are born out of human-animal couplings are representational, and they perfectly fit into the discussions of Posthuman symbioses.

At the ontological crossroad of the Anthropocene, Liz Jensen, assigning Bobby Sullivan as her mouthpiece, rises a crucial question: What is being human? Observing the physical, affective and biological convergence of humans and nonhuman animals in times of crises like species extinction, Bobby Sullivan contemplates on the so-called unique and hierarchically superior categorization of human as follows: "What is man, I wondered then, but a conglomeration of skin and skeleton, his giblets and his kidneys trapped inside? And what is this thing, his brain, but a mere giant overgrown walnut in a case of bone? What is his heart, but a mere organ? As for his soul-" (Jensen, p. 26). He abruptly stops contemplating, and I suspect, Jensen deliberately leaves the rest of the sentence to be completed by the reader. Seemingly, the Anthropocene treats human as just another biological species in Noah's Ark. In parallel with this perceptive change the biblical story of Noah's Ark is deconstructed by Jensen throughout the novel and reconstructed at the end of it. Staring at the wall on which a picture of Noah's Ark is hung, Buck/Tobias promises himself to tell his newborn daughter Tillie a different version of the original biblical story. "In this story," he elaborates, "the Ark has no cages [no class distinctions, categorisations] and no captain [no superior, or inferior race]. And there is land on the horizon. Look. A vast, bare continent, beneath a rainbow. That continent is the future Tillie, I will tell her. It is waiting for us. We are its creatures" (Jensen, p. 343). From this perspective, the ark symbolises the dream of an Earth set in an alternative future in which the categorical borders between biological species are transgressed, hybridity and diversity are celebrated, human and nonhuman species are finally at peace with their identities. And "a boundless hope floods" (Jensen, p. 343) on Earth.

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