POSTHUMANIST ANIMETAPHORS FOR CRITICISM OF THE ENGLISH PROTOCAPITALISM IN BEN JONSON'S *VOLPONE*[*]

BEN JONSON'IN VOLPONE*'SİNDE ERKEN DÖNEM İNGİLİZ KAPİTALİZMİNİN POSTHÜMANİST HAYVAN METAFORLARI YOLUYLA ELEŞTİRİSİ*

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Abstract

Ben Jonson's Volpone (1606), filled with numerous veiled or direct allusions to innate human rational capacity, is, indeed, a very cruel irony and subversion of the predominant Eurocentric and mostly anthropocentric ideals of Renaissance humanist reform linked to an optimistic belief in the daring extreme deeds of well-educated human reason. As a result of the supposedly cultivated human rationality, the Renaissance is also marked by its economic and political balances, embroiled in the bourgeoisie and exposed to tremendous changes due in part to the not yet settled but upcoming free market economy which steadily escalated financial rivalry among individuals longing for being one of the members of the protocapitalist haute bourgeoisies. Accordingly, as this study aims to show, while Jonson criticises social hierarchy caused by a humane inclination towards legacy hunting and the protocapitalist system forcing parasitism as a licence to own power and carnal pleasure, he also attacks the biological hierarchy established between human and nonhuman beings. Though Jonson was a playwright who has a classicist set of values regarding the place of human and nonhuman entities, his use of humours in Volpone becomes a fully functioning political, biological and psychological metaphor for certain generic similarities between the two species. By doing so, Jonson displaces the human/animal distinction, and instead; celebrates the co-existence of all natural beings in harmony, which enables the play to be open to a posthumanist reading involving the co-existence of mental entities and physical matter, which were conventionally separated from each other under the deep shadow of Cartesian dualism.

Öz

Ben Jonson'ın Volpone (1606) adlı oyunu, insanın doğuştan gelen rasyonel kapasitesine dair çeşitli örtülü veya açık göndermelerle dolu olsa da aslında eğitilmiş insan aklının cüretkâr uç edimlerine inanan, ağırlıklı olarak Avrupa merkezci ve çoğunlukla insan merkezci Rönesans hümanist reformu ülkülerinin alt üst edilmesini konu alan bir kara mizahtır. İnsan rasyonelliğinin bir sonucu olarak Rönesans, aynı zamanda erken dönem kapitalist burjuvazinin üyesi olmaya can atan bireyler arasında maddi rekabeti tırmandıran henüz yerleşik olmasa da gelmekte olan piyasa ekonomisi yüzünden meydana gelen değişikliklere maruz kalmış ekonomik ve politik dengeleriyle de göze çarpar. Dolasıyla, bu çalışmanın incelemeyi amaçladığı gibi, Jonson, açgözlü miras avcısı karakterlerine karga, akbaba gibi isimler vererek insanın miras avcılığına olan eğilimini ve sosyal parazitliği güç ve haz elde etmenin ön gerekliliği olarak dayatan erken dönem kapitalist sistemi eleştirirken aynı zamanda insan ve hayvan arasında kurulan biyolojik hiyerarşiye de saldırır. Jonson, insan ve hayvanın sözde ait olduğu farklı yerlere dair klasik değer yargılarına sahip bir yazar olsa da onun Volpone adlı oyununda karakter komedyası kullanımı, insan ve hayvan arasında türsel benzerliklere gönderme yapan politik, biyolojik ve psikolojik bir istiare halini alır. Böylelikle, Jonson insan/hayvan ayrımını göz ardı eder. Bu türcü yaklaşım yerine, Jonson, Kartezyen düalizmi gölgesinde birbirinden ayrıştırılan rasyonelliği ve fizyolojiyi konu edinen post hümanist bir okumaya oyunun kapılarını açar ve doğaya ait tüm canlıların uyum içerisinde bir arada var olabildiği bir yaklaşımı benimser. Onun karakter komedyası tercihi de bu uyum için gerekli olan iki tür arasındaki zihinsel, fiziksel ve psikolojik benzerlikleri açığa çıkarırken, insan ve hayvan arasında var olduğu varsayılan sınırları çiğneyerek iki türün ait oldukları aynı doğada birlikte varoluşuna işaret eder.

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Introduction

Posthumanism, a critical discourse that emerged in the mid1990s, aims to shatter the dogmatic ideals of humanism concerning human perfectibility and exceptionalism embedded in the philosophical impetus of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Accordingly, as Karen Raber ascertains in *Shakespeare and Posthumanist Theory* (2018), *"[p]osthumanist thought thus has many progenitors, an uncertain and fluid lineage-and spawns as many offspring as humanism has and still does*" such as "*animal studies, body studies, cognitive ecology, ecocriticism, the new materialisms and ecomaterialism, and systems theory*" (12). Aside from its common bonds with transhumanism, posthumanism, in the context of animal studies, deconstructs the human/animal dichotomy in order to pertinently mirror human's animal origins with no hierarchical ontological differences in the ecological order. Indeed, animals have formed the skeleton of numerous philosophical, political, cultural, psychological, and socio-historical discourses since Antiquity. However, it is only in the last decades that nonhuman animal communities' centrality has been recognised by scholars from various disciplines due to the inadequacy of traditional anthropocentric approaches to social sciences. Accordingly, as Robert Malcolmson and Stephanos Mastoris assert, neglecting or even rejecting the place of the nonhuman creatures in the past leads to neglecting an important aspect of human society (1998, p. 29). Such recognition paved the way for the appearance of new ways of thinking about the place of animals in human society and culture in order to "*consider human society in the light of zoological information, treating human beings as the human animals that in fact they are*" (Clark, 1999, p.1). Accordingly, when Ben Jonson's *Volpone*, a distinctive example of his 'comedy of humours,' is closely scrutinised, it is apparent that, as Samuel Taylor Coleridge states, *"there is no goodness of heart in any of the prominent characters*" in the play (1874/2004, p. 270), and every character has much to offer to the anti-human content of the play. Through his farcical characters sharing several traits that stand in a stark contrast to a universally valid set of moral principles, Jonson establishes his elegant dramatic style following the classical patterns. However, the carrion birds that some of the characters are identified with in the play such as vultures, crows and ravens, are the organisms whose behaviours and attitudes are modified in accordance with their natural hereditary drives like hunger. Nonetheless, within the world of the play, no other animal except human pushes the limits and behaves in a way that cannot be labelled as a natural instinctive pattern. In other words, the legacy hunters of the play may be resembled to the carrion birds at a surface level in Jonsonian imagery;

yet ironically underneath they are rapacious creatures unnaturally and constantly demanding more than offered or supplied. Volpone, Voltore, Corbaccio, Corvino, all these Venetian gentlemen are already rich enough to not have to conspire against each other or look forward to the death of the other; however they all keenly seek a way to trick the other in order to get his legacy and to enlarge their estates. In this vein, it is possible to observe that in Jonsonian world animals might be more virtuous when compared to humans, for humans, whose avarice is not sourced by natural elements, are inferior to animals. Such concern of the play throws light upon the human relations to its environment, and especially to animals. Thus, *Volpone* goes beyond the label instructive 'medieval bestiary,' and presents a dense array of ways animals were exploited by humans in daily life, the then-contemporary zoology knowledge, the animal content of human rituals and myths including superstitions, and the organic link between human and nonhuman animal during the early modern period. In this way, the play functions as a fascia binding animality and humanity together, and as an arena where the two species are both contrasted with and likened to each other not to glorify human dignity but to fiercely attack human vices such as lust or greed fed by the growing capitalist system. In other words, the socio-economic and socio-political representations of the play's human characters through animetaphors allow Jonson to criticise human greed especially for money and estate as well as promiscuity.

With the aim of deconstructing the essentialist terms which can be found in the scope of discourses on the ontology of nonhuman animals and animality, Jacques Derrida, in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, coins the term *animot* (2002-2006, p. 41), which is combined "*with 'mot' (meaning word) a punning suffix to the French plural 'animaux'*" so that animality "*is not to be understood as "singularizing category 'The Animal' but as multiplicious and discursive*" (Goldman, 2018, p.161). Drawing on Derrida's concept of *animot*, Akira Mizuta Lippit coins the term "*animetaphor*" (*EA,* p.162-97), which simply refers to the use of animality in the realm of figurative language where the human psyche can merge with the animal psyche. Lippit bases his neologism on Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic interpretation of metaphor as a vehicle for the blurring of the lines between the unconscious and animality, and thus allowing the deep world of the unconscious to find expression in language:

> One finds a fantastic transversality at work between the animal and the metaphor-the animal is already a metaphor, the metaphor an animal. Together they transport to language, breathe into language, the vitality of another life, another expression: animal and metaphor,

> a metaphor made flesh, a living metaphor that is by definition not a metaphor, antimetaphor- "animetaphor." The animetaphor may also be seen as the unconscious of language, of logos (2000, p. 165).

From this perch, the use of animetaphors in a text goes beyond the limits of logos which is attributed to only humans and reaches the wilder shores of the unconscious of the unwritten side where *"[t]he genealogy of language, like that of the dream, returns to a place outside logos*" (Lippit, 2000, p. 166). Thus, Jonson's animetaphors become the prime agents for Jonsonian satiric comedy in relation to money politics of the period through intensifying the impact of any kind of irony, whether dramatic, situational or verbal. In this way, Jonson overtly expresses his worries about the rise of the free market economy as a result of the destruction of feudalism by the early capitalist bourgeoisie and its catastrophic dehumanising impact on vulnerable human intellective nature, enabling a posthumanist reading the biological, social or political relations between humans and animals of the play.

Along with his court masques and poems, Ben Jonson (1572-1637) has always occupied an outstanding place in the arena of English Renaissance drama through his identification with the comedy of humours in which characters are identified with their dominant humour in order to satirise human follies. His comedies such as *Every Man in His Humour* (1598), *The Alchemist* (1610), *Bartholomew Fair* (1612), and *Every Man out of His Humour* (1616) are the representative epitomes of Jonsonian comedy of humours, and *Volpone* (1606) reiterated Jonson's place as an officially recognised playwright as "*the exultant dedication of its 1607 edition to the two 'universities' [Oxford and Cambridge] makes clear*" (Parker and Bevington, 1999, p. 1) However, as Allan C. Dessen rightly observes, "*Volpone represents an impressive first step toward, but not the culmination of, Jonson's moral comedy*" (1971, p. 106) due to some relevant but blurring effects of the subplot as well as "*the presence of Celia and Bonario in the midst of the animalistic world of Venice*" (p. 105). The reason for Jonson's strong interest in composing comedy of humours is that he enunciates himself a classicist, and thus, comedy of humours supplies him with the necessary material to amalgamate the techniques of classical drama formulated by Aristotle and the vibrant dynamics of English Renaissance drama. To this end, as Sean McEvoy rightly observes, comedy of humours as part of the Renaissance initiation of classicism provides Jonson with a stage on which he can satirise the politics of the period without getting into trouble with legal barriers (2008, p. 19).

On the other hand, Jonson's application of humours theory to the formulation of tumult in his plays was widely considered to bring to view "*the crude and mechanistic view of the human mind,*" and criticised as the denouement of "*his inability to produce 'convincing' psychological characterisation in the manner of Shakespeare*" by his contemporaries (McEvoy, 2008, p. 20). Certainly, adopting such a method restricts the process of characterisation, and leads to characters who "*are one-dimensional caricatures and lack the psychological complexity*" (Botvinick, 2016, p. 3). Nevertheless, Jonson, holding a cynical view of human nature, is apparently not interested in the individual depth of any character. The "*complete absence of virtue in Jonson's characters is problematic*" (Botvinick, 2016, p. 3) because Jonson is much more interested in the moral message he aims to convey through his one-dimensional stock characters rather than the psychological analysis of them. Analysed in this way, although Jonson's use of humoral comedy enforced by his fable-like narration through his use of animetaphors was criticised for being mechanic in terms of characterisation, it emphasises the physiological and psychological kinship shared by the two entities in contrast to Renaissance anthropocentric elevation of human reason and dignity. In other respects, such a humoral mechanistic outlook on human reason can be seen as a component of Jonsonian didacticism. Indeed, as being one of the most eminent representatives of Renaissance classicism in England, Jonson adopts the idea that imitation and adaptation of the classics are key to educating people, and thus, to developing civilisation. Hence he masters the art of converting classical patterns into the then-contemporary themes and motifs and confers in his prologues to some of his plays such as *Every Man in His Humour* that comedy should have a didactic and moral aim to correct human vices and follies (1598/2000, p. 245). In this respect, as Samuel Taylor Coleridge famously expresses, *"[a]fter the third act, this play becomes not a dead, but a painful, weight on the feelings*" (2004, p. 270). Accordingly, Act V Scene xii, where Mosca is sent to the galleys as a slave-for-life and Volpone is imprisoned by the Senate, sets *Volpone*'s dark tone of comedy. Therefore, his comedies "*show Jonson able to turn his ferocious satirical gifts to a coherent purpose, what he called 'high moral' comedy*" (Black, Conolly et all, 2008, p. 570). In this vein, much in the same way that the animalistic names of the main characters and the self-interest-based relations among them serve the play's clear moral message about the destructive nature of excessive greed, so too does the practical application of the theory of humours. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to focus on how Jonson, as a classicist who is expected to adopt the tenets of the Renaissance humanism,

positions human being as inferior to non-human animal being in *Volpone* through his effective use of animetaphors.

THE SPIRIT OF EARLY ENGLISH CAPITALISM AND JONSON'S *VOLPONE*

The problematic nature of Jonsonian characterisation lies in his ability to convey disruption in his work through comedy, and animetaphors are his agents to mirror cynicism in the dystopian capitalist society of humankind that projects its evil on the enigmatic yet the natural world of animals. In fact, Jonson takes the names of most of his characters from John Florio's Italian/English dictionary, *A Worlde of Words* (1598), in which "*volpone*" is defined as "*an old fox, an old reinard, an old craftie, slie, subtle companion, sneaking, lurking wily deceiver*" (as cited in Stout, 1988, p. 97). In the play, Volpone (the fox) and his servant Mosca (the fly) play a trick on the three legacy hunters whose names alludes to different carrion birds, namely the merchant Corvino (the crow), the lawyer Voltore (the vulture) and the elderly gentleman Corbaccio (the raven). Accordingly, Volpone manipulates them into believing that he is an old man on the verge of death in order to receive expensive gifts from the opportunistic 'birds' by convincing each of them separately that they will be his sole heir and receive all his wealth after his death. In the end, as part of their trick, Mosca declares that Volpone is dead, and he is legally sole heir to Volpone's estate and does not give up his estate. Volpone is urged to reveal the truth at court, and they are all punished. Certainly, Jonson's play is not the first and only one drawing parallels between humanity and animality in literature and art of the medieval and Renaissance eras. Nevertheless, as Richard Dutton justifiably argues, "*no other play of its era is so fully peopled with characters who are explicitly animals, birds, and insects, behaving exactly in the manner of Aesop's archetypal beasts, as the text knowingly reminds us*" (2004, p. 347). On this point, it is of great significance to meditate on the reason for Jonson to form a play which imbued with animalistic humans. In this regard, Dutton furthers his claim by stating that

> [b]east fable was often a form of coded political satire [...]. I want to argue that this is exactly what beast fable was for Jonson in Volpone, following precedents both ancient and modern: that the play is indeed "a manifesto of independence," as its remarkable "Epistle" announces it to be; and that it advises Jonson's "betters and patrons" about the parlous state of England-rather than Venice-at the time it was written, in the wake of the Gunpowder Plot (p. 347).

Accordingly, Dutton interprets the master-servant relationship established between Volpone and Mosca under the strong shadow of the strict royal patronage regulations applied by a governmental body called the Master of the Revels, and Jonson himself was forced to shape his theatrical interests and actions in accordance with these rules (p. 349). In an era in which theatre was one of the most leading commercial industry retails as a popular form of social gaiety, various ways of royal surveillance were carried out in order to observe the loyalty of the plays' content to the royal interest under the two reigns of both Elizabeth I and James I. Thus, by calling attention to the political tone of Jonson's preface to *Volpone*, in which Jonson gives a definition of a successful poet "*that comes forth the interpreter and arbiter of nature, a teacher of things divine no less than human*" (as cited in Parker & Bevington, p. 34), Dutton highlights the great affinities between the micro-political context of the play and the macro-political context of the period out of which Jonson formed his play. On this point, it is important to note that just like Shakespeare, Jonson is one of the Renaissance dramatists who witnessed and experienced the social and political impact of the death of the last Tudor monarch, and the accession of James I, the first Stuart monarch, to the throne first-hand in 1603. The fundamental change that occurred in the social, political, and cultural life in Great Britain during the Renaissance came with a variety of repercussions felt in the field of economy as well. Although the bourgeoisie and free market economy were not firmly established in Jonson's time, the impetus behind such social attitude towards legacy hunting is the then-contemporary changing social forces which were triggered by the broadly liberal politics and economics of the period. In *Sociology of Renaissance* (1932), Alfred Von Martin claims that before being marked with its adherence to fine art, literature and intellectual developments, the Renaissance should be studied in accordance with its economic and politic realities embroiled in, as Martin calls, "*haute bourgeoisie*" that assiduously cultivated the such culture, for "*that class of 'property and intellect' (Bildung) here makes its first appearance in modern history*" (2013, p. ix). From this standpoint, the rise of "*the capitalist domination by the moneyed great bourgeoisie, which exploits 'democratic' tendencies which had destroyed feudalism, as the best way to ensure its own domination*" (Martin, p. 2) in the early modern period stresses the changing social dynamics of the new era. In order to indicate the Renaissance's deliberate breach with the medieval socio-economic heritage and impact of man-in-the-centre trend on the bourgeoisie, Alfred von Martin puts the two bygone eras side by side for comparison:

> In the Middle Ages political power with religious sanction had prevailed: now comes the era of an intellectually supported economic power. Religion as well as politics becomes a means, just as previously commerce and secular culture had been no more than the means to an end. The Middle Ages in their social structure as well as in their thought had a rigidly graduated system. There was a pyramid of Estates as well as a pyramid of values. Now these pyramids are about to be destroyed, and "free competition" is proclaimed as the law of nature. God and blood, the traditional powers, are deposed, and though they maintain some of their importance their dominance is shattered (p. 2).

Surely, Jonson casted a critical eye on the predictable effects of such "*free competition*" on human greed for estate. His choice of setting for his play, Venice, where the first private bank and then the public ones flourished between 1348 and 1584 (Dunbar, 1892, p.312), tells something of his apprehension about the close link between human greed and money. However, as M. H. Abrams and Stephen Greenblatt interpret,

> [t]his dark satire on human greed is set in Venice, but its true target is the city of London, or the city of London is about to become. It is a place devoted to commerce and mired in corruption, populated by greedy fools and convincing rascals. Like Shakespeare, Donne, and Thomas More before them, Jonson was deeply disturbed by the rise of a money economy in which every aspect of life could be prostituted to commercial interest (2000, p. 1303).

Such inhumane greed fed by the spirit of early capitalism forms the skeletal system of *Volpone*'s society. For instance, through Mosca's transformation from a "*flesh-fly*" (V.ix.1) to a "*basilisk*" (V.viii.27), Jonson presents how money can lay the way open for title to get one foot on the social ladder. Although Mosca's name is previously referred to only as a parasite in the court until he gets legacy from Volpone, the 4 Avocatori later sends Notario to learn his name and bring him to the court (V.x.40). Through legacy hunting, Mosca achieves to be "*a brave clarissimo*" though not by birth (V.v.3). In the same vein, Volpone's final punishment is the product of social forces, for "*his crimes expose what society wants hidden, the arbitrary and merely constructed nature of the system of socially organised selves*" (Lawrence, as cited in McEvoy, 2008, p. 68). In effect, this is the core of Jonsonian criticism of society, for "*Jonson protests the inhumanity not just of greedy people but of greedy laws- laws made by the greedy to protect the acquisitions of the greedy*" (Abrams &

Greenblatt, p. 1303). As can be deduced, Jonson's grotesque parody of human nature in *Volpone* alludes to his bitter criticism of the changing social realities around him, and it aims to warn about the possible devastating results of such state of affairs such as parasitism.

BEN JONSON'S HUMOUR THEORY AND THE POSTHUMANIST EQUALISATION OF HUMAN WITH ANIMAL IN *VOLPONE*

While bourgeoisie economy inevitably led to differentiation among the conventionally divided social strata regarding landed nobility and upper/middle/petite/haute bourgeoisie, its efficacy on human/animal segregation in Renaissance anthropology, which prompts the idea that *"[m]an gradually breaks away from nature; as his needs and his industry develop he changes more and more from an animal being into a conscious human being*" (Heller, 1978, p. 325), was fairly clear. To put it another way, the Renaissance is a period in which animal objectification as any kind of human use such as eating, entertaining involving animal-baiting spectacles, hunting, vivisecting, trading is heightened. On this point, Jonson's use of humours defies the conventional acceptance of animals as objects, and more specifically, his application of humour theory in *Volpone* equates the play's human characters with the nonhuman animal entities at least at a corporal level, and thus, deconstructs the idea of human superiority which preconditions humans to be untouched and pure by referring to common physiological shares between the two species:

> The human subjugation of animals allows humans to claim exclusive possession of reason and a set of qualities associated with this claim (language, free will, an immortal soul, and so on), since if animals also possessed any of these qualities, they could resist being dominated. The human subjugation of animals also allows humans to gloss their stereotypically upright posture as heaven-oriented and that of the animals as oriented towards base, worldly appetites. Yet bodily evidence for human distinctiveness stumbles over the obstacle that bodies, whether human or animal, are worldly, and, as such, grow and eat, die, rot, and turn to dust (Steel, 2011, p. 108).

Viewed in this way, the theory of humours, which does not refer only to human bodily features but also involves the animal organism, explains the obvious linkage between the two species, for the biological system of both organisms includes the same natural elements. As the ancient scholar St. Isidore of Seville (560-636) explicates,

> [t]he body is made up of the four elements. For earth is in the flesh; air in the breath; moisture in the blood; fire in the vital heat. For the elements have each their own part in us, and something is due them when the structure is broken up (c. 600-625 A.D./1912, p. 217).

Humans as well as animals are the parts of the same physical environment, and their corpus, which is, Isidore of Seville continues, "*so called because being corrupted, it perishes*," and *"[f]or it is perishable and mortal and must sometime be dissolved*" (p. 217), is also comprised of the natural common components. In effect, the term for humour is "*rather ὑγρόν "fluid:" the "fluids" are the uniform parts (ὁμοιομερη) which are tender and wet in the bodies of animals with blood*" (Demont, 2005, p. 278). In order to clarify this statement, it is important to analyse the roots of humoral pathology. In fact, the basis of the medieval humoral theory dates back to Greco-Roman classical arguments based on the classical tenets of Zeno of Citium (333–264 BC) regarding the four elements, which were followed by the Hippocratic doctors and thereafter by Galenic classification involving the specific patterns of interactions between bodily fluids and a person's psychological profile. Accordingly,

> [b]lood was aligned with the basic qualities hot and wet, and the season spring; yellow bile with hot and dry, and summer; black bile with cold and dry, and fall; and phlegm with cold and wet, and winter. […] When we describe a person's temperament today as sanguine, choleric, melancholic, or phlegmatic, we are, in effect, referring to their dominant bodily fluid or humor: blood (sanguis), yellow bile (cholé), black bile (melaina cholé), and phlegm (Adamson, 2004, p. 205-206).

Despite his Stoic propensity for regarding animals as irrational entities, Galen, who in some cases "*refuses to interact with the test animal which he normally uses for his medical research*," (Vespa, 2017, p. 411-12) owes his four-humour theory to the animals specifically nonhuman primates that he dissected during his experimentations for further human medical profession. Apart from their vivisected bodies for anatomical progression, animals were frequently profited from in order to alleviate human sufferings. At this point, Karen Raber introduces her "*mutual consumption*" so as to illuminate another crucial dimension of the physiologically shared sphere between humans and animals:

> Humans consumed dung and urine, used brains and other internal organs for salves, applied live animals to wounds, ground up both animal and human bones, cooked up messes of snails and worms, and so on in the quest to heal themselves. This process was not one-sided,

> either: human urine, sweat, and bodily effluvia were fed to animals in a similar attempt to cure. This process of exchange emphasized humans' and animals' common physiology, tending to dissolve theoretical distinctions between the two categories of life (2013, p. 104).

Invoking the posthumanist rejection of the Renaissasence anthropocentric universals, the widespread use of animals in Renaissance medical treatment posits a radical continuity between humans and animals, as it can be observed in *Volpone*. While speaking about the ingredients of Mountebank's medicinal oil which recovered Volpone from his alleged failing health, Corvino lists the names and parts of diverse animals that were possibly added to the content of the oil:

> Corvino: […] All his ingredients
> Are a sheep's gall, a roasted bitch's marrow,
> Some few sod earwigs pounded caterpillars,
> A little capon's grease, and fasting spittle:
> I know them to a dram (II.vi.17-21).

Subsequently, Mosca informs Corvino that despite the medical aids of the physicians who applied animals to their treatment, the only way for Volpone to be fully recovered is to sleep with a woman:

> Mosca: Consulting on him, how they might restore him;
> Where one would have a cataplasm of spices,
> Another a flay'd ape clapp'd to his breast,
> A third would have it an oil,
> With wild cats' skins: at last, they all resolved
> That, to preserve him, was no other means,
> But some young woman must be straight sought out (II.vi.28-33).

Such medicinal use of human/animal bodies as a treatment for human/animal diseases, which Raben calls "*the waste-and-body-parts-as-medicine trajectory*" (p. 108), testifies to the certain common physiological aspects shared by humans and animals, and hints at the mutual co-existence of both species. Similarly, in his play, Jonson goes beyond likening human to animal by creating Volpone as the metamorphosis of human being into nonhuman animal being.

Indeed, *Volpone* draws on earlier narrative traditions which employ anthropomorphic foxes. The wicked anthropomorphised fox in Reynard the Fox coils up into the villainous zoomorphised human through the characterisation of Volpone in the crafty hands of Jonson with the aim of socio-political satire on the changing

economic policies and their effects on human morality. Bearing in mind that the widespread use of animals to give moral lesson has always been one of the essential functions of animals' appearance in literary works, *Volpone* has been mostly interpreted as a morally instructive animal fable. The animalistic metaphors of the play illuminate the play's central argument and affirm the theme of parasitism. Over the course of the play, Volpone (the fox) is circled by the carrion birds, namely Voltore (the vulture), Corbaccio (the crow), and Corvino (the raven), waiting for the fox to die so that they can eat it. However, they are tricked by Volpone through the help of his parasitic servant, Mosca (the fly), who finally cheats his master. Accordingly, *Volpone* traces back to Aesopian fables along with the Reynardian convention of the medieval vulpine epic, "*even as it operates within a moral universe in which a degree of order, in the form of poetic justice, is achieved*" (Robles, 2016, p. 69). However, Jonson enmeshes zoomorphism in his play, attribution of animal traits to human, with the aim of conveying the same moral message found in the tradition of anthropomorphism, attribution of human traits to nonhuman, in folk tales.

Nevertheless, Jonson's play is not solely a fable with a deliberate attempt at conveying a moral lesson; it also challenges the duality between the corporal nonhuman animal and the intellectual human so as to merge the natural agency with the cultural territory. As Lawrence Danson cogently expresses, Volpone is "*not just a symbol, but a symbol-using animal, that is a man*" (as cited in McEvoy, 2008, p. 67). For instance, Volpone's name does not stand only for his fable role as the fox; instead, he leaps out at the audience as a beast by all his appearances with his "*gown*," "*furs, and night-caps*" (I.ii.84-5). When analysed in this way, Volpone, along with the other zoomorphic characters identified with their attributed animal qualities, becomes an arena where humanity is entangled with animality, and they nest inside one another. At this point, the careful choice of animal plays a crucial role in the creation of zoomorphic characters. Accordingly, *"[h]ardly any other mammals living in the wild enjoy as much popularity as the fox [vulpes]-both male and female (vixen) alike-in the traditions since antiquity*" due to "*its physical and mental faculties*" referring to "*cunning, slyness, perfidy, and even wickedness*" (Uther, 2006, p. 134). Mario Ortiz Robles focuses on the reasonable grounds for Reynard the Fox's specific choice of fox figure in the eyes of the public:

> The vices symbolized by the figure of the fox come to be naturalized in this tale of social cunning and upward mobility in which the fox itself plays an almost invisible role. The vulpine epic thus offers a significant counternarrative to the benign tale of recognition and domestication

> that characterizes the dog tale. Dogs are a "companion species," to use Donna Haraway's suggestive phrase, in part because we share our otherness with them in a domestic space, along with the microorganisms, habits, and affects that transit between both species. Foxes, in contrast, exist at the further edges of domestication, remaining wild as a species, even as they are routinely hunted for sport, which makes the fox a symbolically rich site for staging the encounter between nature and civilization (2016, p. 70).

Thus, Jonson's fox, which is a human, can be reinterpreted in accordance with anthropomorphism, the term "*used to describe the belief that animals are essentially like humans,*" and "*usually applied as a term of reproach, both intellectual and moral*" (Daston & Mitman, p. 2).

In this issue, Kenneth Varty traces the deep roots of English fox lore back to French Renarts and later Dutch Reinaerts, and stresses the popularity of Reynard's iconic status figure by conveying that "*he was once the leading character in a book meant for adults which became best-seller in the fifteenth century and remained popular for more than 200 years, a book characterized by violence, murder, adultery, rape and corruption in high places*" (1999, p. 23). In fact, along with animal symbolism, the Reynard stories were quite common to the Renaissance folk, and *"[t]he animal analogies and stories were so pervasive, in fact, so taken for granted, that their influence functions at an almost subterranean level; and this obliquity of influence is nowhere truer than in England*" (Parker, 1976, p. 5). Around 1481, *Reynard the Fox*, based on its Dutch version, was translated into English by William Caxton who stuck to the original source of his translation. Nonetheless, some adaptations in the story occurred in the seventeenth century, for "[*t]he seventeenth century asked for literature that was not only entertaining but also morally appropriate, and therefore reprintings of the Reynard story appeared with some changes, additions and abbreviations*" (Varty, 1999, p. 254-255). Jonson's animalia is, then, absorbed harmoniously into his effort to instil morals into his audience and the didactic lecturing of the period.

Another significant aspect of the play with the most linkage to the discussion on human/animal division is Jonson's direct implications of the mythical animals. At the very outset of the play, Mosca mentions and, in a way, introduces Corvino, Corbaccio and Voltore by calling them "*harpies*" (I.ii.121), which are mythical and mystical "*fabulous monsters, part woman, part rapacious bird -an image appropriate to grasping, rapacious persons, and perhaps hinting at costuming of the birds of prey visiting Volpone*" (Parker & Bevington, p. 60). Indeed, as Cassandra Eason informs,

harpies exemplify how the human interpretation of animetaphors are subjected to change in time, for

> [i]n early Greek mythology, the three Harpies were not ugly or evil as were their later personae. With bird bodies, and heads and breasts of women, they were originally described as beautiful, long-haired, winged goddesses of the storm, with the ability to fly faster than the wind. Like the Valkyries, the swan maidens of Viking myth, the Harpies bore away the souls of the slain for healing. In time, however, they acquired the image of hideous old women with the bodies, wings, beaks, and claws of birds, who seized mortals or semideities and carried them off to the underworld, leaving in their wake a foul stench (2008, p. 55).

Borrowing this archetypal figure from the story of Jason and the Golden Fleece in Greek mythology, famous Roman myth-tellers Ovid and Virgil apply to harpies in the composition of their classical works. For instance, in his *Aeneid* (29-19 BC), Virgil depicts harpies as ferocious birdlike animalistic figures which "*have faces like girls*" and "*have hands like claws*" (III.211-20) when Aeneas and his people, on their way to Italy, cramp within the confines of the harpies' island Strophades (elaborate). Virgil's depiction of harpies constitutes an immediate source of Ovidian harpies in *Metamorphoses* (VII.3-4). Moreover, such animalistic metaphor of woman-bird "*also taps into the Roman belief that witches were synonymous with metamorphosis and flight*" (Johnson, 2016, p. 128), and would pave the way for the medieval and Renaissance concept of the witch figure in the witchcraft discourse. On the other hand, these classical works and their interpretation of the mythological creatures functioned as a common-place books that Renaissance dramatists could consult and cite in their plays. At some point, it is important to recall that humanism, the backbone philosophy of the Renaissance culture, began as a movement grounded in the discovery, translation, and imitation of the classical Greek and Latin texts. Thus, it is no coincidence to come across numerous incontrovertible borrowings from classical literature in Renaissance literature and art. As Jonson refers to Ovidian and Virgilian mythic figure of harpies in depiction of his characters, Shakespeare makes use of the same figure in *The Tempest* (1610) in which, as V. M. Vaughan explains, Ariel's vindictive reappearance in disguise as a harpy (III.iii.52) is associated with destiny and divine retribution (1999, 52.1, p. 238). In *Volpone*, on the other hand, Mosca uses "*harpies*" (I.ii.121) as a derogatory term, for he calls Corvino, Corbaccio and Voltore as harpies with an emphasis on these legacy hunters' gullible nature. In

effect, Mosca's epigrammatic depiction of the legacy hunters is visualised in his master Volpone's witty use of chimera as a metaphor implying their miserable condition at the court:

> I am Volpone, and this [Indicating Mosca] is my knave;
> This [Indicating Voltore], his own knave; this [Indicating Corbaccio], avarice's fool;
> This [Indicating Corvino], a chimera of wittol, fool, and knave (V.xii.89-91).

As can be observed, Jonson does not confine his use of mythical animals to direct quotations from the classical literature but also subtly fits his characters' condition into a caricatured version of mythical animals as in the case of chimaera, "*a mythical three-natured beast (traditionally part lion, part goat, part serpent)*" (Parker & Bevington, p. 205) that is turned upside down in Volpone's ironic description of "*a chimera of wittol, fool, and knave*" (V.xii.89-91).

It is blatantly obvious that Jonson's *Volpone* raises considerable doubts as to the spotlighted human physical and intellectual endowment found in mostly anthropocentric content of the Renaissance anthropologic matters. Jonson bases his play on a broad dramatic irony of the plays' corrupted human characters whose words and actions are constantly contrasted, and for this reason the play goes beyond a crude farce and embodies dark comedy. For instance, for Volpone, who says *"[g]ood wits are greatest in extremities*" (V.ii.6), being witty means being immorally cunning. He accounts himself clever; yet the issues he meditates on such as sleeping with a married woman are all about greed and lust. He considers himself "*the great beast;*" yet he is deceived by his supposedly harmless fly Mosca who turns out to be a much more sinister *"[e]xcellent basilisk*," a reptile that could kill with its glance, as Volpone calls Mosca (V.ix.28). In this way, Jonson presents his bitter criticism of Renaissance fervent belief in edifying human rationality, and stresses the point very strongly that human, as a part of natural world, has its own weaknesses and advantages. Mosca likens Voltore's situation to "*hog-louse*" (V. iii. 90), an insect with the ability to transform itself into a ball in case of danger, when Voltore learns Volpone chooses Mosca as his heir. Indeed, Mosca's simile both epitomises the struggle of every character to survive in a society which glorifies parasitism instead of any "*honest polity*" (III.vii.65) and equates such world with the natural world of animals where they develop natural strategies in order to stay alive such as feeding on another life form as the carrion birds do:

> This is the creature had the art born with him;
> Toils not to learn it, but doth practise it
> Out of most excellent nature: and such sparks
> Are the true parasites, others but their zanis (III.i.30-33).

In his lines, Mosca's deliberate use of "*creature*" and "*nature*" formulates parasitism and presents it as a natural innate quality bestowed on only the "*spark*" ones among humans. Thus, Jonson's perception of human nature as naturally base that is allegorised to that of animals might not be a coincidence.

Conclusion

Although normative Renaissance discourses insist on philosophical and intellectual parameters that differ human from animal, in accordance with the socio-economic changes, the Renaissance is marked by its growing social and cultural demand for reconstruction of the value and meaning of the animal body with all of its implications in any kind of context. In this vein, Ben Jonson's use of humour theory along with his zoomorphic characters in *Volpone* refers to the shared sensitivity of human and animal, and the play offers a new perspective on human/animal relations. When analysed in the spectrum of posthumanism, *Volpone* crosses the human-animal divide in order to both construct and deconstruct Renaissance humanism's elevation of the dignity of human and becomes an arena where the pair of supposedly conflicts such as animality and humanity, nature and civilisation, are amalgamated within each other. By doing so, the play, with its numerous animetaphors as powerful instruments in introducing the audience/reader with sexual and class politics in England in the early seventeenth century, fully exposes Jonson's criticism of the dogmatic ideals of Renaissance humanism degenerated by the Renaissance capitalist monetary politics and the ascendancy of human beings over the world of animals. In other words, as being a satire on the nature of human's greed growing prodigiously from the Renaissance monetary policies, *Volpone* presents Jonson's scepticism about human greed for money and human morality, which is clearly in conflict with the tenets of Renaissance humanism. On this point, Celia's cry, "*I would I could forget I were a creature*" (IV.v.102), resonates Jonson's own pessimism, and *Volpone* expresses a great deal of scepticism and criticism of the playwright about the ideals of Renaissance humanism elevating the intellectual power of human being.

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Summary

Although normative Renaissance discourses insist on philosophical and intellectual parameters that differ human from animal, in accordance with the socio-economic changes, the Renaissance is marked by its growing social and cultural demand for reconstruction of the great affinity between human and animal in any kind of context. Drawing on Jacques Derrida's concept of *animot*, Akira Mizuta Lippit coins the term "*animetaphor*" (EA 162-97), which simply refers to the use of animality in the realm of figurative language where the human psyche can merge with the animal psyche. Correspondingly, Lippit's concept of animetaphor comes into existence in some plays of the English Renaissance drama such as Ben Jonson's *Volpone* (1606). When such plays are deconstructed, it is possible to observe that in contrast to the Renaissance ideals foregrounding the ethics of humanism, they have an anti-anthropocentric or posthumanist approach or they are open to a posthumanist reading, for the dramatists shatter the rigid hierarchy between the two categories of creatures through the use of animetaphor, demonstrating the conflict between humanism and posthumanism. Viewed in this way, animetaphor is mostly applied in the early modern English drama to unveil the dramatists' critique of certain notions in Renaissance thinking which may lead to failure and corruption instead of progress and perfection, and to point to rather intermingled common bonds existing between human and animal. Accordingly, this study suggests that Ben Jonson's application of humour theory in *Volpone* equates the play's zoomorphic human characters with the nonhuman animal entities at least at a corporal level, and thus, deconstructs human identity and hubris by referring to common physiological shares between the two species. In this vein, *Volpone* transgresses the limits of the label instructive 'medieval bestiary,' and throws light upon the human relations to animals in the early modern period. Thus, *Volpone* is not solely a fable with a deliberate attempt at conveying a moral lesson; it also challenges the duality between the corporal nonhuman animal and the intellectual human so as to merge the natural agency with the cultural territory. Moreover, the animalistic metaphors of the play illuminate the play's central argument and affirm the theme of parasitism.

Through its animalistic human characters whose names are derived directly from animals such as Volpone (the fox) or Voltore (the vulture) the play offers a dense array of ways animals were exploited by humans in daily life, the then-contemporary zoology knowledge, the animal content of human rituals and myths including superstitions, and the organic link between human and nonhuman animal during the early modern period. In this way, the play functions as a fascia binding animality and humanity together, and as an arena where the two species are both contrasted with and likened to each other not to glorify human dignity but to fiercely attack human vices such as lust or greed fed by the growing capitalist system. In other words, the socio-economic and socio-political representations of the play's human characters through animetaphors allow Jonson to criticise human greed for especially money and estate as well as promiscuity.

Apparently, it is of great significance to meditate on the reason for Jonson to form a play which is certainly not the first and only one drawing parallels between humanity and animality in literature and art of the medieval and Renaissance eras. Nevertheless, as Richard Dutton justifiably argues, "*no other play of its era is so fully peopled with characters who are explicitly animals, birds, and insects, behaving exactly in the manner of Aesop's archetypal beasts, as the text knowingly reminds us*" (2004, p. 347). On this point, the strong ties between

the micro-political context of the play and the macro-political context of the period out of which Jonson formed his play reveals that Jonson is one of the Renaissance dramatists who witnessed and experienced the social and political impact of the death of the last Tudor monarch, and the accession of the first Stuart monarch to the throne first-hand in 1603. Such a fundamental change that occurred in the social, political, and cultural life in Great Britain during the Renaissance came with a variety of repercussions felt in the field of economy too. Although bourgeoisie and free market economy were not firmly established in Jonson's time, the impetus behind such social attitude towards legacy hunting is the then-contemporary changing social forces which were triggered by the broadly liberal politics and economics of the period. Surely, Jonson casted a critical eye on the predictable effects of such free competition on human greed for estate. As the legacy hunting between the carrion birds indicates, such inhumane greed fed by the spirit of early capitalism forms the skeletal system of *Volpone*'s society. Thus, Jonson's grotesque parody of human nature in *Volpone* alludes to his bitter criticism of the changing social realities around him, and it aims to warn about the possible devastating results of such state of affairs such as parasitism.

Consequently, it can be argued that Jonson bases *Volpone* on a broad dramatic irony of the plays' rapacious human characters who constantly demand more than enough, and for this reason the play regards humans as inferior to animals. In this way, his play has something against the spotlighted human physical and intellectual endowment found in such anthropocentric content of the Renaissance anthropologic matters.