Beyond Postmodern Irony: Empathetic Storytelling in Hilary Mantel's *Beyond Black*

Derya Komar

Aydın University, English Language and Literature, MA student.
ORCID ID: 0009-0009-7368-3838

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary age, which has impacted the world and its inhabitants with a sense of anxiety and uncertainty, stemming from economic, political, global, and environmental events, has woven its effects into diverse scopes of life. In the late 20th century, the challenges facing the modern world intensified and peaked in the subsequent century due to events such as the 9/11 attacks, the 2008 global financial crisis, conflicts leading to refugee crises in regions like the Middle East, and environmental disasters like Chernobyl (1986) and Fukushima Daiichi (2011). Additionally, incidents such as the Exxon Valdez oil spill (1989), the Deepwater Horizon oil spill (2010), and the issue of global warming have further contributed to this heightened sense of risk and uncertainty, impacting both nations and individuals alike. Beside these various scopes of life, literature has also been impacted by the transformation of the world. The impact on literature has been particularly pronounced with embracing a sincere one on behalf of the author by abandoning the excessive irony and carefree attitude of postmodernism, signalling a transformation beyond the conventional realms of postmodernism. As Nicholas Stavris states in *Supplanting the Postmodern* (2015), "faced with a contemporary culture of anxiety, artists attempt to overcome the uncertainties of the human condition in the twenty-first century by reaching out for a renewed period of sincerity. Authenticity is the new focus for the present day artist" (p. 407). Similarly, in *The Post-war Novel and the Death of the Author* (2020) Arya Aryan remarks this positive change in literature by noting that a "new concept of authorship emerges in this more globalised and fragile new risk therapy culture for it produces pressures on novelists not only to embrace the New Sincerity but to return to the old eighteenth-century ideals of the novelist as a purveyor of moral sentiment within the new version of liberal economics" (p. 179). Hence, the change in the attitude of authors has led to the emergence of many new theories, which critique the excessive irony, detachment, and scepticism that characterize postmodern culture. Contemporary literature advocates for a return to sincerity, authenticity, and earnestness in literature by prioritising genuine emotion, connection and empathy. By examining the implications of this shift, this article explores Hilary Mantel's *Beyond Black* (2005) within the context of metamodernism, aiming to reveal the discernible shift away from the detached irony of postmodernism towards a literary landscape that values sincerity and empathy. Through a detailed exploration of Mantel's narrative choices, this analysis aims to uncover how the author places empathy at the forefront of storytelling. This article contends that Mantel's work exemplifies a crucial transition in contemporary literature, highlighting the integral role of empathy in weaving one's life into the narrative fabric to overcome the challenges of the contemporary age, thereby portraying contemporary authors as more responsible and engaged in shaping the literary experience, bridging the gap between sincerity and irony.

LITERARY CONTEXT

Starting with the late 20th century, the transformations in diverse scopes reached a level that brought about unexpected consequences with the pervasiveness of the concept of globalisation. The new era of global politics experienced a fundamental restructuring of diverse national institutions, political structures, and economic frameworks. As Manuel Castells argues, the world economy became truly global through "the new infrastructure provided by information and communication technologies, and with the decisive help of deregulation and liberalization policies implemented by governments and international institutions" (2003, p. 311). The interconnected segments of the global economy formed a network which play a decisive role in the economies of individual countries and the lives of many people. Moreover, advancements in science and technology played a significant role by leading to a change in the structure of society as well as in human connections. David Held and Anthony McGrew define the globalised human connections of the contemporary age by stating that "[n]ations, peoples and organizations are linked … by many new forms of communication which range across borders. The revolution in micro-electronics, in information technology and in computers has established virtually instantaneous worldwide links" (2003, p. 40). Similarly, Zygmunt Bauman, delves into the intricacies of the contemporary age, focusing on anxiety as its prominent feature, and asserts that comprehending the intricacies of

personal safety and its depiction in society holds considerable significance. As Bauman argues, "[t]he preoccupation with personal safety, inflated and overloaded with meanings beyond its capacity due to the tributaries of existential insecurity and psychological uncertainty, towers yet higher over all other articulated fears, casting all other reasons of anxiety into yet deeper shade" (2005, p. 119). In line with Bauman's observation, the concerns regarding personal safety have been exacerbated in an era characterised by increasing connectivity through computers, cell phones, and the internet. Despite the emergence of negative consequences such as the blurring of online and offline identities and insincerity in human connections, the advancement of technology has also opened avenues for collaboration, innovation, and global solidarity, offering potential solutions to address the challenges posed by the complexities of globalization. Amidst these shifts and technological progress, globalization has concurrently expanded the realm of literary narratives by fostering cross-cultural exchanges.

Scholars such as Arjun Appadurai, Stuart Hall, and Edward Said have extensively researched and written on global themes like migration, diaspora, and cross-cultural encounters, which underscore the impact of globalisation on contemporary literature. Mirroring the societal shifts and offering nuanced perspectives on the challenges of the globalising world, contemporary literature reflects the anxious condition of individuals in this world of uncertainties. However, since the contemporary world differs from the age of postmodernism due to globalisation, with its new stance in geopolitics, economy, and advances in science and technology, it has necessitated authors to play a more active role than merely mirroring and criticising with irony and scepticism, as the legacy of postmodernism. According to *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, "[p]ostmodernism borrows from modernism disillusionment with the givens of society; a penchant for irony; the self-conscious 'play' within the work of art; fragmentation and ambiguity; and a destructured, decentered, dehumanized subject" (Guerin et al., 2005, p. 300-1). In other words, the legacy of postmodernism is built upon fragmentation of every concept, such as the world view, norms, values, and identity. Although postmodernism provides essential perspectives to question before believing in anything, it falls short to the needs of the contemporary age in which individuals are fragmented and anxious, feeling disconnected. Linda Hutcheon states her view of the necessity of a change by stating that "[t]he postmodern moment has passed, even if its discursive strategies and its ideological critique continue to live on – as do those of modernism – in our contemporary twenty-first-century world. Literary historical categories like modernism and postmodernism are, after all, only heuristic labels that we create in our attempts to chart cultural changes and continuities. Post-postmodernism needs a new label of its own" (2002, p. 181). Therefore, within this dynamic literary landscape, there has been a discernible departure from the detached irony of postmodernism towards a more sincere narrative approach. This demonstrates how postmodern irony, with its critique of grand narratives and playful cynicism, has led to the emergence of various new theories emphasizing sincerity in storytelling. *Beyond Black* exemplifies this shift in contemporary literature. In the novel, memory's role in healing the wounded, fragmented psyche of the contemporary globalized world arises with storytelling. It serves both as a means to recover the heroines' memories, hence reconstructing their identities and having unity, and as a way to heal the fragmented contemporary world on a global level. As Aryan argues, "[t]he Victorian preoccupation with spiritualism, or invocation of the dead voices, becomes a figure for the contemporary woman writer's concrete externalisation of inner dialogic conflict through the creation of character" (2019). On a personal scale, the heroine of the novel is a wounded figure who resorts to a sort of spiritualism and utilises storytelling as therapeutic.

POSTMODERNISM AND FRAGMENTATION

Following World War II, the upheaval that the globe underwent affected various aspects of human existence, including literature, psychiatry, and the fundamental notion of individual identity. As a result of the damage caused by the war, which led to the disintegration of established norms both in the external world and the condition of the human psyche, linguistic structures and societal frameworks had been re-evaluated. The literary landscape reflected the fragmentation of reality with the split of the sign concept and the debates about the death of the author. In addition, questioning the traditional concepts with deconstructive methods led to new perspectives on not only literary texts but also Western notions that define the understanding of the world and the self. mental health emerged which challenged traditional psychiatric procedures. Concurrently, the redefinition of psychotic experiences and the anti-psychiatric movement echoed in literature, especially with woman authors. The historical events, psychiatric ideas, with a special emphasis on schizophrenia, and revolutionary literary theories mirrored the fragmentary characteristic of the post-World War II era, influencing the core values of postmodernism. Therefore, unravelling the layers of post-war intellectual and cultural evolution is necessary to examine the roots of fragmentation, which is the cornerstone of postmodernism's legacy, and understand how it shapes our perceptions of literature, psychiatry, and identity in the contemporary world.

This section delves into the reasons of the legacy of postmodernism, specifically its emphasis on fragmentation, by analyzing the changes that occurred in literature and the psyche during the post-war era and throughout the latter half of the 20th century. Structuralism and Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic theories introduce fundamental concepts such as the distinction between language and speech, and the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign, challenging traditional notions of language as a mere reflection of reality. Building upon Saussure's insights, poststructuralist thinkers like Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes further destabilize traditional linguistic frameworks, highlighting the inherent instability and deferral of meaning within language. Therefore, the legacy of structuralism and poststructuralism, particularly their interrogation of language and meaning, has profound

implications for contemporary literature and cultural discourse. By examining the fractures within linguistic structures and the psyche, this analysis seeks to uncover how the linguistic and psychological fragmentation of the post-war era continues to shape contemporary understandings of identity, reality, and narrative expression.

During 1950s, structuralism and the theories of Ferdinand de Saussure held prominence in the field of linguistic studies. Saussure's ideas regarding the structure of the language were initially presented in the notes from his lectures, later compiled and published under the title *Cours de Linguistique Générale* (1916). Saussure introduces two key concepts in linguistics: language referring to the general structured system of signs and rules, and speech referring to the use of language by individuals, which should be primarily focused on as it is the direct and natural representation of linguistic communication. Saussure prioritizes speech over other means by arguing "language [langue] … is not to be confused with human speech [langage], of which it is only a definite part, though certainly an essential one" (2011, p. 9). To unravel how language functions, Saussure examines linguistics synchronically rather than diachronically and incorporates the concept of semiology, focusing on linguistic signs and their role in conveying meaning.

Moreover, exploring the nature of the relationship between the signifier and the signified, Saussure emphasizes that the connection between the two is "arbitrary in that it actually has no natural connection with the signified" (2011, p. 69). Saussure's theory of signs indicates that language does not simply mirror the external reality but functions as a system that is employed in the construction of meaning based on differences. Adding the arbitrariness in the linguistic sign that introduces a split in the presumed link between words, his ideas challenge the traditional view of language, and art consequently, reflecting reality and paved the way to question established notions of objectivity and truth in various disciplines. According to Julia Kristeva, Saussure's theory based on the gap between the signifier and the signified contributes to the disconnection between truth and the speaking subject. Kristeva states that "[d]etermining truth was reduced to a seeking out of the object-utterance's internal coherence, which was predetermined by the coherence of the particular metalinguistic theory within which the search was conducted" (1980, p. 24) and highlights the problem of accuracy that may emerge from the inherent constraints within the framework of sign, signifier, and signified. Building on this perspective, Aryan observes that, "what has come to be known as the crisis or critique of the representation of reality, that reached its acme in poststructuralism, was mainly triggered by Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic model and observation of the arbitrariness of the relation between the signifier and the signified" (2022, p. 17). This observation contributes significantly to the notion of the reconceptualization of truth that came with structuralism. In essence, Saussure's introduction of semiology, in which the resultant meaning is split into two separate entities as the signifier and the signified, introduced a rupture in traditional linguistic thought by challenging the direct correspondence between language and reality. This change in the understanding of language, meaning and representation paved the way for new perspectives and discussions in various academic disciplines, laying the groundwork for poststructuralist inquiries.

While *Writing and Difference* lays the groundwork for Derrida's critique of structuralism, it is in *Of Grammatology* that he criticizes the traditional Western metaphysics and the privileging of speech over writing. Opposing Saussure's theory of linguistics which presents writing as a representational figuration of language that is outside the internal system of language, Derrida argues that writing has a more complex role that influences and determines the structure of language. He states that "a science of language must recover the natural-that is, the simple and original-relationships between speech and writing, that is, between an inside and an outside" (Derrida, 1997, p. 35). He deconstructs the traditional opposition between speech and writing and highlights the role of writing in the production of meaning. Thus, Derrida's own notion of deconstruction is a response to and a critique of the limitations of structuralism, a notion that seeks to explore and transcend the boundaries set by structuralism.

In his influential essay "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of Human Sciences" (1966), Derrida establishes the foundations of deconstruction. He problematises the centred way of thinking, logocentric, of Levi-Strauss and Saussure, because it causes one opposing term to supress the other. In order to show the formation of reflexive thought in a contradictory and differential language without a centre, Derrida states:

> We could thus take up all the coupled oppositions on which philosophy is constructed, and from which our language lives, not in order to see opposition vanish but to see the emergence of a necessity such that one of the terms appears as the *différance* of the other, the other as "differed" within the systematic ordering of the same (e.g., the intelligible as differing from the sensible, as sensible differed; the concept differed-differing intuition, life as differed-differing matter; mind as differed-differing life; culture as differed-differing nature...). (1973, p. 148-9)

Emphasizing the interdependence of opposing concepts, Derrida introduces the term he coined *différance*, which denotes both difference and deferral. He suggests that within this system of differences, one element of the oppositional pair is perceived as the *différance*, signifying both difference and deferral of its meaning, while the other element is considered as "differed" within a systematic order. This interpretation of *différance* in the meaning of the term challenges traditional notions of stability, origin, and fixed meaning within the structure of language and thought that relies only on the opposition. The absence of a fixed centre leads to rupture and reshapes the understanding of linguistic and conceptual structures.

Similarly, Roland Barthes emphasizes the continuous deferral of meaning within the linguistic system and rejects the idea that language can express subjectivity or definite concepts with stable signifieds. In his famous essay "The Death of the Author,"

(1967) which delves into the linguistic nature of the pronoun I, Barthes states that "language knows a 'subject', not a 'person', and this subject, empty outside the very enunciation which defines it, suffices to make language 'hold together,' suffices, that is to say, to exhaust it" (1977, p. 145). He refers to the grammatical function of the pronoun I, as opposed to the person, and suggests that the pronoun I gains meaning and significance only within the act of speaking or writing, being essentially empty or devoid of inherent meaning. As Aryan explicates, "identity and subjectivity is constructed in this language system, so becoming fragmented, split and underdetermined and is therefore no longer understood as an inner core identity finding direct expression through a language which is simply its verbal reflection" (2020, p. 18). Moreover, Barthes declares the disappearance of the author's identity by asserting that "[w]riting is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing" (1977, p.142). The author undergoes a symbolic demise during the act of writing because the texts crafted by the author surpasses his/her control and gain a life of their own with the reader's interpretation. The rejection of the idea that language expresses subjectivity or definite concepts with stable signifieds suggests that identity and subjectivity are contingent on linguistic structures. For Barthes, as for many other poststructuralists, identity is a textual construct with no preceding agent and is constantly being constructed and deconstructed in the process of writing. In so doing, Barthes contributes to the narrative of identity fragmentation. He replaces the concept of the author whose identity precedes his work with the modern writer who "is in no way supplied with a being which precedes or transcends his writing, he is in no way the subject of which his book is the predicate; there is no other time than that of the utterance, and every text is eternally written here and now" (Barthes, 1977, p. 145).

The impact of deconstruction on the understanding of self and psyche intensified the sense of fragmentation that people had already been dealing with in the aftermath of World War II. Individuals struggled both with the linguistic and psychological breakdown of traditional narratives. Beginning with the catastrophic events of World War II, the latter half of the 20th century saw profound shifts in global geopolitics, economy, and social structures. The post-war era witnessed a new set of challenges including the Cold War, ideological disputes between the East and West, and the malevolent use of technological advancements. However, beyond palpable changes in external realities, the age also had a profound impact on the human psyche. Those who survived the horrors of World War II, directly or indirectly affected, grappled with an array of psychological challenges stemming from the trauma of war, loss of loved ones, and the involuntary displacement of refugees. Moreover, the Holocaust, along with other genocides and war crimes, caused indelible wounds not only on the sufferers but also on the collective psyche with the moral dilemma it brought. Furthermore, the postwar era presented a new level of terror, which was compounded by technical breakthroughs such as the use of nuclear bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In this context, the psyche became a battleground of fragmentation, leading to various psychiatric conditions stemming from the disintegration of the self. In the study of trauma and narrative after World War II, Ville Kivimäki states that "[h]istories of both world wars, as well as many other violent aspects of the twentieth century, were increasingly being discussed from the perspective of trauma, thus emphasizing the mental shocks caused by modern industrialized warfare and genocide" (2022, p. v). Trauma became the defining feature of the 20th century with its catastrophic events and created indelible scars in human psyche.

This dissociated psyche explanation finds resonance in the way literary narratives reflect the disintegration of self-awareness. The condition of the post-war individual is that of Beckett's protagonist in *The Unnamable* which "shows the breakdown of the Cartesian Cogito in a post-war soulless world in which its inhabitants suffer from disconnectedness" (Aryan, 2019a, p. 107). As a result, the fragmentation in individuals' psyche during this time increased the focus on psychiatric examinations and treatments. Costas N. Stefanis mentions the conceptualisation of psychiatric disorders after World War II with the emergence of the psychodynamic concept and states that "[s]ince the mid-1950s with the development of neuroleptic drugs, and subsequent social shifts toward patient rights, accountability as well as technologic advances in data acquisition and processing, the biologic and nosologic points of view have become preeminent" (1990, p. 49). In this context, among various psychiatric disorders, schizophrenia requires a special examination since it "literally means split mind" (Kales et al., 1990, p. 17) and highlights the sense of disarray and fragmentation of psyche of an individual who struggles to make sense of a world that has been altered by the war and destruction of concepts acknowledged as truth for centuries.

METAMODERNISM AND *BEYOND BLACK*

Characterised by a blend of modernist sincerity and postmodern irony, metamodernism offers a nuanced understanding of contemporary literature. It acknowledges the fragmented nature of the postmodern condition while striving for a renewed sense of meaning and authenticity. Therefore, one of the key characteristics of metamodernism is its juxtaposition of sincerity and irony, often within the same narrative framework. Initially synonymous with postmodernism, the term "metamodern" first arose in Mas'ud Zavarzadeh's article "The Apocalyptic Fact and the Eclipse of Fiction in Recent American Prose Narratives" (1975) and has evolved to describe a distinct cultural attitude, as highlighted by Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker in "Notes on Metamodernism" (2010). Utilising it to describe a new attitude in modern cultural productions, Vermeulen and Akker observe that "metamodernism should be situated epistemologically with (post) modernism, ontologically between (post) modernism, and historically beyond (post) modernism" (2010, p. 2), and identify the emergence of a new discourse that oscillates between modern enthusiasm and postmodern irony. They highlight postmodernism's incompetence in explaining and offering remedies for the

profound and detrimental shifts that have occurred in the fields of the environment, economics, geopolitics, and the arts in today's society. A shift away from the scepticism and irony associated with postmodern aesthetics is indicated by their observation of contemporary art. This shows that "new generations of artists increasingly abandon the aesthetic precepts of deconstruction, parataxis, and pastiche in favor of aesth-ethical notions of reconstruction, myth, and metaxis" (Vermeulen, Akker, 2010, p. 2).With its emphasis on engagement and constructive action, metamodernism not only acknowledges the inherent inconsistencies of human life in a globalised society but also introduces a new mindset that is more responsible, constructive, sincere, and sympathetic aiming to reach out to the reader while being the voice of reality and hope.

In *Beyond Black*, Hilary Mantel demonstrates metamodernist features through various narrative elements, one of which is the novel's narrative structure that combines elements of realism with surrealism and metafiction. One example of realism is the portrayal of everyday life and mundane activities of the characters, such as their interactions with each other and their surroundings. This realistic portrayal grounds the narrative in a recognisable world. The characters Alison and Colette are presented in the novel as two women trying to survive independently in the globalising contemporary age, with their real-life struggles regarding their jobs, homes, relationships and identities being altered. However, this realism is often juxtaposed with surreal elements, such as the protagonist Alison's encounters with ghosts and supernatural phenomena. These surreal elements disrupt the conventional reality of the narrative and add a fantastical dimension to the story. Mantel employs these metafictional techniques by blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality. One notable example of this is Alison's character as a medium, who acts as a conduit between the spirit world and the living, thus becoming a storyteller in between the living and the dead. Alison's psychic abilities serve as a potent tool in storytelling. By shaping the story with insights into the past and future, Alison simultaneously constructs her own identity, thus contributing to storytelling and enriching the creative process of authorship. Therefore, Alison assumes a kind of narrative authority, recounting the story based on her experiences and perceptions. By presenting herself as a psychic who bridges the gap between the mundane and the mystical, Alison highlights moments where the characters become aware of their participation in the narrative fabric. In this sense, both Alison and Mantel are narrators that weave the story of self, bringing the fragmentated pieces together. Similar to paranoia which "can be viewed as a creative energy which is directed and channelled through storytelling that helps the writer maintain a degree of control and agency which would otherwise be existentially threatening" (Aryan, 2023, p. 341), Alison's fragmented psyche externalized via her hallucinations becomes a creative force in substantializing the characters and plot.

In addition to the structural aspects of *Beyond Black* that reflect some characteristics of metamodernist theory, the thematic feature of metamodernism, which is the interplay between sincerity and irony, becomes evident as the characters grapple with existential dilemmas. The ghosts in the novel serve as expression of irony, commonly employed in contemporary fiction, which allows the author to express contemporary anxieties and uncertainties, thus reflecting the complexities of the globalised world. Throughout the narrative, Alison seeks to establish agency and identity within a society fraught with threats, violent patriarchs, terrorists, and global concerns. Moreover, she is constantly hold back or blocked by the relentless haunt of her past, the ghosts. Mantel reflects women's preoccupations such as overcoming past traumas and healing the world in the 21st century global culture through Alison's ghosts, with the normalisation of supernatural events, creating an ironic contrast with reality. As Aryan argues, "Alison's story and Mantel's memoir are attempts to restore memory and readjust past and present to construct a coherent story: the creation of a coherent self" (2019b). For example, when Alison reflects on her enduring relationship with Morris, one of the ghosts who visits her, she realises his true intentions behind his nocturnal intrusions: "[t]hat was why he kept her up all night, pawing and pulling at her—not because he wanted sex, but because he was plotting to be born, to be carried inside some unknowing hostess … the filthy, dirty little sneak" (2005, p. 179). This depiction of Morris's persistent attempt to exist underscores the haunting challenges posed by traumatic memories and an uncertain environment, which hinder Alison's progress and compel her to confront her existence amidst a multitude of ghosts.

The new attitude of contemporary authors emerges in the novel with Mantel's employment of a long-forgotten value, sincerity, in the structure of her narrative through Alison's attempts of genuineness whether directed towards her business partner, and customers, or simply towards all those who endure. With both the irony and sincerity being in the framework, unlike its predecessor, the novel embraces a dynamic interplay between these elements and offers a nuanced understanding of contemporary literary expression and the human experience. Throughout the novel, Colette accuses Alison of being insincere and dishonest on many cases. The scene where Alison read cards for Colette exemplifies Colette's thoughts of Alison, which she expresses as "[b]eing nice. Being professional. It's all the same to you. You're the most insincere person I know" (Mantel, 2005, p. 202). Although Colette thinks that Alison is just being nice, like a professional psychic who tries to comfort people with sugar-coated words, Alison actually presents her sincere self and thoughts on many cases. One example for that can be seen in Alison's conversation with Colette after a psychic show, explaining why Alison has an evil spirit guide instead of an angel. As Alison says "—if you ask why I have an evil guide, it's to do with the fact that I'm a bad person, because the people who were around me in my childhood were bad. They took out my will and put in their own" (2005, p. 321), she confesses her true thoughts about her self and identity, thus being sincere both with her past and her psyche even if it means the resurgence of past traumas. In addition, Colette's tape-recording Alison in order to write a book of her life presents the honest and sincere attitude of Alison. As a traumatised woman who has supressed her memories, the more Alison talks about her past, trying to remember and bring the pieces together, she reaches to a point where she

can self-criticise herself and speaks of her life and thoughts sincerely. Moreover, apart from being open about the destructive and negative issues, Alison also shows sincerity in her relationship with Colette. Although both women have very different characteristics and life views, Alison appreciates the presence of Colette in her life and expresses this as "[y]ou're a godsend to me, and I don't know what I ever did without you. I never thought I'd get someone to agree to live in, and you can see that at a time of crisis, twenty-four-hour care is what I need" (2005, p. 134). Developing a more honest and sincere attitude, Alison reawakens a sense that has been overlooked, and she strengthens this new view particularly with her empathetic approach towards others, which underscores the profound connection between sincerity and empathy.

EMPATHETIC IMAGINATION IN *BEYOND BLACK*

Empathy, defined as the capacity to understand and share the feelings of others, serves as a bridge that connects individuals and fosters meaningful relationships. It transcends mere sympathy by necessitating an active engagement with others' experiences and emotions, thus promoting compassion and understanding. In the face of the complex challenges of the 21st century, characterized by heightened levels of trauma, existential anxiety, and societal fragmentation, empathy emerges as a crucial lens through which to navigate the complexities of human experience. Unlike the ironic detachment often associated with postmodernism, embracing empathy offers a pathway towards genuine connection and collective understanding, especially in the context of the interconnected globalized world. Analysing the link between empathy and narration in *Empathy and the Novel*, Suzanne Keen argues that "[e]mpathy, a vicarious, spontaneous sharing of affect, can be provoked by witnessing another's emotional state, by hearing about another's condition, or even by reading" (2007, p. 4). In the scope of literature, empathy plays a crucial role for authors to confront and navigate the complexities of the contemporary age. Through empathetic narratives, authors address pressing social issues, grapple with existential dilemmas, and offer insights into the human condition. This empathetic engagement with literature not only enriches the reading experience but also promotes empathy in real-life interactions, contributing to a more compassionate and empathetic society. In *Beyond Black*, Hilary Mantel explores the transformative power of empathy through the character of Alison, whose ability to connect with others, including ghosts, serves as a metaphor for her empathetic imagination and critical reflection on the human condition.

As Aryan contends, Mantel is one of the contemporary authors who "employ the technique of ironic distancation to create a sense of fellow-feeling, without falling into sentimentalism or complete scepticism. [Her] novels, via self-reflexivity, mise-en abyme, together with postmodernist scepticism, explore the limits of empathetic imagining" (2020, p. 205). The setting of *Beyond Black* depicting Britain's wastelands at the turn of the 21st century as "fields of strung wire, of treadless tyres in ditches, fridges dead on their backs, and starving ponies cropping the mud", its inhabitants "with outcasts and escapees, with Afghans, Turks and Kurds: with scapegoats, scarred with bottle and burn marks, limping from the cities with broken ribs" and the mention of global environmental concerns like "the life forms [that] are rejects, or anomalies: the cats tipped from speeding cars, and the Heathrow sheep, their fleece clotted with the stench of aviation fuel" (2005, p. 6) reflects the broader societal and environmental issues caused by the impact of globalisation. In addition, the novel gives voice to the sufferings of contemporary women through the interactions Alison has with the ghosts. Although Alison cannot remember her past clearly due to the traumas she has had in her childhood, she sometimes recalls blurry images or scenes in her mind, like Aitkenside saying "[t]he tricky little bitch. We'll show her what a knife can do" (2005, p. 300). Being subject to sexual harassment and violence in her childhood, Alison's psyche becomes fragmented, like a schizophrenic, leading her to have hallucinations. The ghosts of characters like Morris, MacArthur, Bob Fox, Aitkenside, Pikey Pete and Keith Capstick represent the violent patriarch that asserts dominance through the suppression of women and allow Alison to reflect critically on the contemporary women's condition.

The ghosts that Alison sees and talks to refer more than a mere criticism of the contemporary age. Acknowledging these imaginary personalities which actually stem from her traumatised psyche as ghosts and drawing her future in the path of a psychic, Alison discovers a way to deal with her trauma, to confront and cope with her internal struggles that have been silenced for a long time. As Aryan contends, "[t]he Victorian preoccupation with spiritualism, the invocation of the voices of the dead, becomes a figure for the contemporary woman writer's externalisation of an inner dialogic conflict that is concretised through the creation of character" (2020, p. 207). Through the interaction with ghosts, Alison faces her supressed and fragmented self, and as she comes to terms with them and assert her authority again, she builds up her psyche and self, creating interconnectedness between the fragmented pieces. Furthermore, beyond her personal struggles, Alison's psychic abilities allow her to connect with diverse perspectives, serving as a conduit for others' experiences. Colette describes the aftermath of Alison's psychic sessions as "[b]y the end of the evening she'll be sick to her stomach from other people's chemotherapy, feverish and short of breath; or twitching and cold, full of their torsions and strains. She'll have a neck spasm, or a twisted knee, or a foot she can hardly put on the floor" (2005, p. 30). In other words, Alison's physical manifestations after psychic sessions underscores the depth of her empathy, as she absorbs and channels the pain of others. In essence, Alison's mental disorder not only facilitates her own healing but also fosters connections and empathy on a societal level.

In light of Alison's spiritual experiences and the broader societal implications portrayed in *Beyond Black*, it becomes apparent that empathy serves as a significant tool that Alison uses while bringing the fragmented pieces of the self together. This

empathetic attitude not only shapes individual experiences but also leads to collective understanding. The empathetic approach in the novel starts with Alison's first encounter with Colette at a psychic session. Regarding Colette's broken marriage, Alison's unorthodox and sensitive approach towards Colette, on a subject that she has been pitied for, reveals the depth of Alison's empathy and her ability to connect with others on a profound level. In this scene, the narrator reflects on Alison's demeanour compared to another psychic, Natasha. As she states:

> Natasha had been a spiteful little slag, and the woman on the platform seemed to have no spite in her; Natasha had implied she was too old for new experiences, but Alison spoke as if she had her life before her. She spoke as if her feelings and thoughts could be mended; she imagined popping into the dry cleaners and getting the broken zip replaced, the zip that joined her thought to her feelings and joined her up inside. (Mantel, 2005, p. 68)

Alison's sensitive and thoughtful approach not only reveals the depth of her empathy but also sheds light on the impact of empathetic connections within Mantel's narrative, suggesting an approach leading to understanding and connection, as opposed to postmodernist attitudes. As Colette perceives Alison's genuine concern, the scene underscores the emotional resonance between characters. The depth of Alison's empathy becomes even more pronounced in the aftermath of Princess Diana's death. As the narrator states, "[i]t seems another era now, another world: before the millennium, before the Queen's Jubilee, before the Twin Towers burned" (Mantel, 2005, p. 124). The change of Alison's attitude not only refers to the impact of global incidents at the turn of the century, but also underscores her growing awareness of the interconnectedness of global events and personal experiences. Aspiring to be like Princess Diana, the Queen of Hearts, Alison embraces sincerity and empathy as a coping mechanism against the escalating complexities and uncertainties of the age. Amidst a changing world, Alison grapples with the desire to emulate Princess Diana's altruism. Reflecting on her struggles, she remarks "I wanted to do a good action but I never seem to manage it. It's not enough just to be nice. It's not enough just to ignore it when people put you down. It's not enough to be—forbearing. You have to do a good action" (2005, p. 293). In the midst of these trials, Alison's pursuit of empathy and action stands as a beacon of hope, signalling a shift towards a more proactive and compassionate approach to addressing societal injustices and personal challenges.

Moreover, Alison's empathetic faculty is exemplified in her behaviour towards Mart, a troubled and emotionally unstable homeless young man hired for gardening. By feeding and listening to him, and letting him crash in her shed, Alison demonstrates her unwavering empathy towards Mart. Rather than dismissing him or treating him with indifference, Alison extends a compassionate hand and recognizes his humanity and inherent worth. She offers him not only practical assistance but also a sense of belonging and acceptance, creating a safe space where Mart feels seen and understood. By feeding and listening to him, and letting him crash in her shed, Alison's actions exemplify her commitment to embodying the sincerity. She recognizes that mere niceties or tolerance are insufficient; genuine kindness requires tangible acts of compassion and support, even in the face of adversity, through empathy. In light of Alison's genuine compassion towards Mart, her introspective query regarding how to connect with him underscores the depth of her empathy. "What can I give him? Alison wondered. What would he enjoy? Poor little bugger. You see somebody like that and say, well, his mother must have loved him; but in his case, no" (Mantel, 2005, p. 256). Furthermore, when Colette accuses Alison of harbouring Mart, Alison replies with "I don't know … I don't think so. I didn't have an intention, I just wanted to do a good action, I suppose I didn't think; I just felt sorry for him, because he's got nowhere to go and so he has to go in a shed" (Mantel, 2005, p. 273). These reveal that Alison's empathy extends beyond mere sympathy or pity; it reflects a profound understanding of others' struggles and a genuine desire to alleviate their suffering.

In *Beyond Black*, Hilary Mantel weaves empathy into the narrative fabric and reveals its profound influence on individual experiences and broader societal themes. Through the character of Alison, Mantel illustrates the transformative power of empathy, portraying it as a bridge that connects individuals across diverse backgrounds and experiences. Alison's empathetic interactions with both the living and the spectral beings not only reveal her capacity for understanding and compassion but also serve as a reflection of the broader human condition. From her sensitive approach towards Colette's struggles to her genuine concern for Mart's well-being, Alison embodies empathy in its purest form, fostering meaningful connections and offering solace amidst the complexities of the contemporary age. Moreover, Alison's empathetic journey underscores the significance of empathy as a guiding force for personal growth and societal understanding, emphasizing its ability to transcend boundaries and cultivate a more compassionate and empathetic society. Through Mantel's exploration of empathy, the novel challenges readers to reflect on the importance of empathy in navigating the complexities of human relationships and addressing the pressing social issues of the contemporary age.

CONCLUSION

Taking into account the key points and arguments presented in the article, Mantel's *Beyond Black* emerges as a compelling demonstration of the transformative power of empathy in contemporary literature. Through the character of Alison Hart, Mantel presents the complexities of the modern age, transcending the detached irony of postmodernism to embrace a narrative landscape rooted in sincerity and emotional resonance. As the protagonist grapples with existential dilemmas and societal oppressions, Mantel underscores the crucial role of empathy as a means of survival and connection. The novel transcends mere storytelling, serving as a lifeline amid the anxiety and uncertainty of the era. Moreover, the empathetic journey undertaken by Alison throughout the novel

not only mirrors broader societal shifts towards compassion and understanding but also offers readers a blueprint for personal growth. By exploring Alison's moments of empathy and connection with others, Mantel invites readers to consider the transformative potential of empathy in their own lives. Encountering empathy in literature such as *Beyond Black* can inspire readers to cultivate empathy in their interactions, fostering a more compassionate and understanding society. In essence, Mantel's work signals a departure from postmodern indifference, ushering in an era where empathy plays a paramount role in shaping human experiences. As Aryan aptly observes, "[t]he novel is existential (as it writes and constructs a self), political (as it lays bare the oppressing laws and norms such as that of patriarchy) and social (as it aims to connect and empathize with other fellow humans)" (2020, p. 220). In this broader context of contemporary literature, Mantel's magnum opus stands as a testament to the profound impact of storytelling in fostering compassion, empathy, and meaningful connections, echoing the sentiments of a generation seeking solace and solidarity amidst the chaos of modernity.

REFERENCES
1) Aryan, Arya (2019a). Fiction as Therapy: Agency and Authorship in Samuel Beckett's *The Unnamable. Exchanges: The Interdisciplinary Research Journal*. 9/1, pp. 107-123.
2) Aryan, Arya (July 2019b). The Traumatised Shaman: The Woman Writer in the Age of Globalised Trauma. *Alluvium* (special issue).
   https://alluvium.bacls.org/2019/07/01/the-traumatised-shaman-the-woman-writer-in-the-age-of-globalised-trauma/
3) Aryan, Arya (2020). *The Post-war Novel and the Death of the Author*. Palgrave Macmillan.
4) Aryan, Arya (2022). *The Postmodern Representation of Reality in Peter Ackroyd's Chatterton*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
5) Aryan, Arya (2023). The Literary Critic and Creative Writer as Antagonists: Golding's *The Paper Men. Interdisciplinary Literary Studies: A Journal of Criticism and Theory, 25*(3), 338-353.
6) Barthes, Roland (1977). The Death of the Author. In S. Heath (Trans.), *Image, music, text* (pp. 142-148). Fontana.
7) Bauman, Z. (2005). *Globalization: The Human Consequences*. Polity.
8) Castells, M. (2003). Global Informational Capitalism. In D. Held & A. McGrew (Eds.), *The Global Transformations Reader: An Introduction to the Globalization Debate* (2nd ed., pp. 311-334). Polity.
9) Derrida, Jacques (1973). "Differance." In *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs* (pp. 129-161). Trans. D. B. Allison & N. Garver. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
10) Derrida, Jacques (1997). *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
11) Guerin, W. L., Labor, E., Morgan, L., Reesman, J. C., & Willingham, J. R. (2005*). A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature* (5th ed.). Oxford University Press.
12) Held, D., & McGrew, A. (2003). The Great Globalization Debate: An Introduction. In *The Global Transformations Reader: An Introduction to the Globalization Debate* (2nd ed., pp. 1-50). Polity.
13) Hutcheon, L. (2002). *The Politics of Postmodernism* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
14) Kales, A., Kales, J. D., & Vela-Bueno, A. (1990). Schizophrenia: Historical Perspectives. In A. Kales, C. N. Stefanis, & J. A. Talbott (Eds.), *Recent Advances in Schizophrenia* (pp. 3-24). Springer-Verlag.
15) Keen, S. (2007). *Empathy and the Novel*. Oxford University Press, Inc.
16) Kivimäki, V., & Leese, P. (Eds.). (2022). *Trauma, Experience and Narrative in Europe after World War II*. Palgrave Macmillan.
17) Kristeva, Julia (1980). *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (L. S. Roudiez, Ed.; T. Gora, A. Jardine, & L. S. Roudiez, Trans.). Columbia University Press.
18) Korsgaard, C. M. (2009). *Self-Constitution: Agency, Identity, and Integrity*. Oxford University Press.
19) Mantel, H. (2005). *Beyond Black*. Henry Holt and Company
20) Saussure, Ferdinand d. (2011). *Course in General Linguistics* (W. Baskin, Trans.; P. Meisel & H. Saussy, Eds.). Columbia University Press.
21) Stavris, N. (2015). The Anxieties of the Present. In D. Rudrum & N. Stavris (Eds.), *Supplanting the Postmodern: An Anthology of Writings on the Arts and Culture of the Early 21st Century* (pp. 406-423). Bloomsbury Academic.
22) Stefanis, C. N. (1990). On the Concept of Schizophrenia. In A. Kales & C. N. Stefanis (Eds.), *Recent Advances in Schizophrenia* (pp. 25-58). Springer-Verlag.
23) Vermeulen, T., & Akker, R. v. d. (2010). Notes on Metamodernism. *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture*, 2(1), 5677.
24) Zavarzadeh, M. (1975). The Apocalyptic Fact and the Eclipse of Fiction in Recent American Prose Narratives. *Journal of American Studies*, 9(1), 69-83.