Holding onto Grief in the Present-Future: Objects of Emotion in *The Line Tender*

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Introduction: Overlapping Metaphors and Actions

Watery spaces are central to *The Line Tender*, Kate Allen's 2019 novel for young readers. Living in the coastal town of Rockport, Massachusetts, the protagonist, Lucy, is surrounded by adults who work in or on the water—her father, Tom, is a search-and-rescue diver; her mother, Helen, was a shark biologist; and their close family friend, Sookie, is a fisherman—and she and her best friend spend the summer at the water's edge looking for creatures to include in their homemade field guide to the local flora and fauna. Despite her close proximity to and regular interaction with water, Lucy feels uncertain and traumatized around water due to its association with death of her loved ones. Five years prior to the events of the novel, Helen dies from a ruptured brain aneurysm while she is on a research expedition ten miles offshore, and about halfway through the novel Fred drowns in front of Lucy while they swim in a quarry. Lucy notes her hesitancy around water a number of times: she worries that her father will encounter a concealed great white shark while diving (Allen 20-1); when driving to swim in the quarry, she says the cold weather makes her want to "go in the water even less than normal" (101); and she goes so far as to call being near water "traumatic" at one point (247). Water takes the lives of two of her most important loved ones, and its concealing properties factors heavily into how Lucy grieves Helen and Fred.

Allen relies on complex layering to explore Lucy's grieving process, employing overlapping metaphors and actions that situate Lucy an active participant in deciphering the object of her grief and discovering her own coping mechanisms. The novel's title is also one of the primary metaphors used to explore grief as a future-oriented activity that seeks to recover that which is lost in death, namely relationships to the people who have passed away. A line tender, as explained in the novel, is the member of a dive team that stands on shore and holds onto the tether connected to the diver searching for a drowned person. Lucy's father describes the line tender as the person who "sees *everything*. Reads the divers' signals, the terrain, the equipment. Uses all the resources to stay connected to the other end of the line" (Allen 348). Lucy takes on this role as she attempts to recover her connection to Helen and Fred after the water has taken them from her. As she tends the lines of her grief, she interacts with six physical objects that represent the three components the line tender must read—signals, terrain, and equipment—to maintain a connection. As Lucy metaphorically assumes the role of the line tender, she practically assumes the role of a shark researcher. The activity of researching sharks overlaps with the metaphorical action of tending the lines of grief, and the six objects she interacts with as

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she takes on both positions are either metaphorical or actually involved in helping her uncover the complexity and permanence of her grief. These dual positions and the objects she uses to participate in her grief point her towards the water as a site of metaphorical and actual (re)connection: at the water, she can reconnect with Helen and Fred while simultaneously forming a connecting to the water as a site of affective marking that stands in as an imperfect substitute for her deceased loved ones. Undergirding all of these interconnected elements is the sense that Lucy's grief is nonlinear and temporally complicated.

My analytical goals in this essay are as layered, complicated, and circular as the novel's metaphors, actions, and figures. First, I aim to examine how the physical objects infused with emotional meaning reveal the temporal complexities of Lucy's grief; second, I hope to demonstrate that Lucy's metaphorical line tending is an attempt to uncover and recover the emotional meaning of her relationships with Fred and Helen; third, I plan to show that Lucy's actual shark researching is an attempt to understand how her grief is centered on maintaining the emotional connection she has lost; and finally, I attempt to consider how watery spaces are sites of (re)connection even if they are not sites of soothing comfort for Lucy. To accomplish these goals, I draw from Sara Ahmed's theories on affect and emotions to read the objects Lucy interacts with as surrogates that impress upon Lucy when her loved ones no longer can. I use the term "present-future" at times to denote the combination of Lucy's present with her deceased loved ones' now impossible futures; in a present reality where she has lost two members of her social and emotional circle, the objects allow her to simulate, in part, what it would be like for them to be with her in the futures she speculates they could have shared. Helpful, too, is Michael R. Kelly's philosophical assertions that grieving is not about a loss in the past but rather a realization about "the new significance of a world with the pervasive absence that is the world without the beloved" (159). The purpose of this analysis is to show how *The Line Tender* fits into a tradition of grief literature for young readers that illuminates larger societal perceptions of death and grief.

Literature Review: Reading Death in Children's Literature

Before turning my attention to the scholarly field in which I would like to situate my analysis of Allen's novel, it is worthwhile to briefly note that *The Line Tender* blurs some of the boundaries between children's and young adult (YA) literature. The novel takes place in the summer of 1996, which is the summer before Lucy and Fred are set to begin eighth grade. As two almost-thirteen-year-olds, Lucy and Fred embody the awkward in-betweenness of being not quite a child and not quite a teenager. The prominent presence of adult characters as moral and practical guides shows these characters are not given the same independence or freedom as characters in some YA novels, and Lucy feels "an enormous divide" between herself and some teenagers who are only four years older than her (Allen 108). At the same time, Lucy and Fred's budding romance and first kiss is

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intimate and delicate in a way that transcends some romances found in middle grade novels. Additionally, Lucy and Fred's series of shark penis jokes and Lucy's concern over her developing body is just a step below explicit, bringing in what could be considered teenage elements. Essentially, this books defies easy categorization. Roberta Seelinger Trites writes that "[c]hildren's literature often affirms the child's sense of Self and her or his own personal power" while "the adolescent novel" focuses on a protagonist's interaction with "the social forces that have made them what they are" (3). As Lucy grieves, readers encounter a young protagonist searching to rediscover herself in the face of turmoil and loss, but they also see a young protagonist finding her way in a world informed by social values that she's questioning for the first time. Because of this, I situate my reading of this text in sources that consider both children's and YA literature, as well as psychological sources that account for the internal lives of both demographics.

There is an established critical tradition of considering the social and psychological implications of depicting death in literature for young readers. In fact, one of the articles published in the first volume of *Children's Literature* in 1972, written by Francelia Butler, was simply entitled "Death in Children's Literature." Butler catalogues how different cultures represent death in texts for children, such as whether death is considered "matter of fact" (105) or a fantasy (109), and whether the tone talks down to children or not (111). Undergirding Butler's writing is the belief that the way a culture introduces the concept of death to children is a strong indicator of death's role as a cultural and social practice in a given community or tradition. This is a line of thinking that both Kathryn James (2009) and Karen Coats (2020) take up, with James writing about gender and sexuality's influence on societal conceptions of death and Coats connecting the changes in attitudes towards death in YA literature to nihilism and technological evolutions. These two texts help provide the exigence of studying fictionalized deaths in children's literature—studying books for young readers that contain depictions of death brings to light questions about social and cultural values that emphasize the role of literature in bringing child readers into an established tradition and perception.

In addition to considering the cultural implications of depicting death in children's literature, scholars have also written about whether death is even an "appropriate" topic for children to read about. James summarizes that when critics label representations of death as "too morbid, too painful, or too likely to induce psychological harm," they are working within the feeling that "the very act of bringing 'death' and 'children' together is unsettling," and thus "not a suitable topic for either children or the novels that are produced for them" (2). An important subtopic within this line of scholarship revolves around the idea of bibliotherapy, which implies, in part, that if death is an appropriate topic for children's literature then it must serve some larger purpose of rehabilitating or comforting child readers who have themselves experienced loss. Maguth et al. (2015) shares an example of bibliotherapeutic work by examining the practices of a teacher who used picture books to help her students cope with the loss of their class pet. Giskin Day (2012) looks at the response to Patrick Ness's *A Monster Calls* (2011) in order to argue that readers gained

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tools that can be used in times of emotional distress, such as when a young person loses a parent. The use of books as tools for grieving is not universally condoned, however; just one example is Joel D. Chaston's (1991) criticism of bibliotherapy, where he claims that books, such as Katherine Paterson's *Bridge to Terabithia* (1977), should not be used as a "cure for or fast solution to the problems children face," especially when those books romanticize death by presenting it as "noble and temporary" (239). Chaston's solution, and the perspective I would like to carry throughout this essay, is that depictions of death in children's literature benefit readers the most when a novel "stimulates reader to look within themselves and search their hearts for their own solutions to problems" (239). This stance, combined with James's and Coats's stances that representations of death reveal something about cultural attitudes toward death set the stage for my analysis of *The Line Tender*, as I read Lucy's use of objects of emotion connected to her deceased loved ones as an example of a young protagonist looking within herself as she grieves while also interacting with a number of outside parties that inform how she understands and internalizes concepts of death. Allen's novel does not prescribe one way of mourning loss, which is evident in the fact that all the characters in the novel mourn differently—Lucy turns to material objects and connected activities, her father falls into a deep depression, and Fred's family all present a variety of grieving processes. Even as it does not dictate one model, it does present an option that emphasizes continued connection that must be found through personal items that could potentially serve as a possible way forward for young readers who can find their objects that help them reconnect with people who they have lost.

In an essay examining a novel centered on a child's grieving process, it is worthwhile to acknowledge psychoanalysis as a foundation for understanding how and why children mourn. Psychoanalytic developments first made it possible for children's literature studies in the latter half of the 20th century and the early years of the 21st century to evaluate the interiority of the children represented in children's literature. Children's literature scholar Nat Hurley writes that it is "fair to suggest that with the emergence of psychoanalysis, the psychic life of children comes to be taken seriously in quite different ways" than it had been in the first half of the 20th century (6). Psychological and psychiatric research from these years demonstrates that attachment helps us understand the child's mourning process. Psychiatrist John E. Baker (2001) claims that psychoanalysis allows for constructing mourning around the "internal attachment to the person who has died" without having to force a premature detachment from the lost loved one (56). Additionally, developmental psychologist Benjamin Garber (2008) writes that we can no longer "view the child's mourning as a deficient version of the adult process" (176). By casting a child's grief as a legitimate process aimed at maintaining attachments to a deceased loved one, psychoanalysis validates a reading of Lucy's mourning as a temporally-conscious action concerned with not just recovering lost opportunities and spaced for affective marking but maintaining the attachments that form when marking happens.

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While I do draw from psychoanalysis, I rely more heavily on affect theory as it is presented by Sara Ahmed in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2013). Ahmed writes that "attending to emotions might show us how all actions are reactions, in the sense that what we do is shaped by the contact we have with others" (4). As my analysis shows, Lucy does not stop being shaped by Fred and Helen after they have passed away, which is evident by her eventual participation in shark researching due to their influence. Objects of emotion, which Ahmed defines as the things that circulate in emotional economies (11), contain the emotional potential Lucy needs to hold onto her attachment to her loved ones, meaning she uses the objects of emotion to maintain a level of interaction that still allows Fred and Helen to shape her and still allows Lucy to react to that shaping. Ahmed's theory is abstract in a way that means almost anything, including people, can be an object of emotion, but in my analysis I am focusing on how actual, physical objects become surrogates for Fred and Helen, not because of inherent agential autonomy, but precisely because the Lucy's loved ones have woven their emotional histories into the objects.

Analysis: Being the Line Tender, Being a Researcher

The objects left behind by, or associated with, Fred or Helen give Lucy, in her grief, a tactile and material avenue by which to break down the different components of her relationships in order to determine what and how she grieves. These objects exist as imperfect substitutes for Fred and Helen, but they still serve as emotional lines for Lucy to tend after her loved ones have been claimed by the waters of death. As children's literature scholar Holly Virginia Blackford writes, "The existence of some inanimate thing and the memory of its significance are forever enmeshed," meaning Lucy's history with these people is inseparable from the objects they interacted with (2). While there are many objects within this novel, I focus my attention on three that are connected to Fred and three that are connected to Helen. Each object aligns with one of the components a line tender must read or use to stay connected to whoever is under the surface of the water, as outlined by Lucy's father (Allen 348). Fred's collection of jazz music and a recorded interview of Helen function as the "signals" from the divers below the surface; A pendant from Fred and one of Helen's annotated cookbooks fill the role of the "terrain"; and Lucy and Fred's field guide and one of Helen's research proposals stand in for the "equipment".

In order to read these objects as inviting a temporally-conscious understanding of grief and its connection to affective relationships, it is crucial to acknowledge that Lucy works with simultaneous griefs, combining the old grief for Helen with her new grief for Fred. Though her relationships with them are quite different, this conflation happens, I believe, because Fred had become the line that connected Lucy to Helen after her death. Fred's own aptitude for marine science meant Lucy had someone to mediate and interpret Helen's work for her, with a notable example being when they initially work on the shark page of their field guide in Helen's home office. Fred, not Lucy, is the one who efficiently navigates the library of textbooks and research papers (Allen 82); he is the one who already

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possesses knowledge about shark biology and shares it with Lucy (84); and he is the one who feels eager excitement about discovering the proposal written only months before Helen's death (87). So, far from being a perfect stand-in for the maternal, Fred acts as a strong connection to Helen's most defining feature, her love of marine life, which is why his death compounds Lucy's grief—she essentially loses her connection to Helen all over again. This conflation of griefs, which often makes Helen appear as secondary, aligns with how Lisa Rowe Fraustino and Karen Coats write about mothers: "Often [the mother] is relegated to background noise […] but her influence remains significant and worthy of close consideration" (3). Because mourning Fred often reminds Lucy that she still mourns her mother, the rest of this essay follows a pattern of examining items associated with Fred first and then Helen second precisely because the background influence of the mother is significant enough to influence how Lucy thinks about Fred.

Signals

As the line tender, part of Lucy's task is to read the signals that come from below the surface of the water. In the metaphorical sense, the water is both her grief and death, as Lucy must work with the emotions she feels as she grieves to recover what death has sunken out of her reach. Fred's small collection of jazz music and a recorded interview with Helen about her work function as these signals, as both items rise to the surface for Lucy to read after her loved one has passed on; she is presented with a fixed representation of the person in the past, but the waters of grief and death obscure the meaning of the signals, which calls her memories of her loved ones into question. Kelly describes the role of memories in grieving this way: "we are not grieving about the memories themselves, because the memories themselves are not lost" (172). Instead, the role of the memories is to highlight the stark contrast between the past, where the loved one is still alive, and the present or future, where the loved one has been lost. For Lucy, however, her reliance on memories is complicated, as the jazz music and the interview illuminate ways in which Lucy was unknowledgeable about Fred and Helen, and this gap in knowledge heightens her grief. If, as Kelly argues, grief is a future-oriented action based on an understanding of how the loved one existed in the past, then destabilizing Lucy's conception of who Fred and Helen were in the past makes the future even more uncertain. Lucy grieves the future, and her grief is, in part, compounded by the opportunities to learn more about her loved ones that she is now going to miss out on. In essence, without clear memories, the future is concealed and her emotional attachment to her deceased loved ones is further challenged.

Fred's status as an almost-teenager at the time of his death is a major contributor to Lucy's discombobulation when faced with the jazz music. In death, Fred is frozen in a state of becoming—not quite a child, not quite a teenager—and his changing interests in the summer leading up to his death obscure him in Lucy's mind. At one point, she notes, "[U]p until recently I thought I knew everything there was to know about Fred. Then this summer, there were all these new things. Fred growing his hair, listening to different music, jumping

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in the quarry" (Allen 281). The music as an object is something Lucy can look to try and decipher who Fred was and who he was becoming, which is a necessary part of grieving the relationship they had and could have had. Lucy notes that Fred had played trumpet in their school's jazz band for a couple years but had always listened to rock bands like Led Zeppelin and Pink Floyd in his spare time, so his turn to listening to jazz musicians like Miles Davis and Herbie Hancock confuses her (Allen 57). Before Fred's death, Lucy hears him play his new jazz music through his open bedroom window across the road from hers, but she can only glimpse him dancing and playing along with his trumpet (62). The day after seeing him dance, they have a conversation about the music where she tells him "it just sounds different" and asks him if he ever listens "to songs with words anymore" (68). Before Fred's death, wordless music tells Lucy there is something he fails to communicate with her, and his death removes any chance she had of gaining clarification. Though a jazz song is rarely played the same way twice, Fred, like the recorded version of a Mile Davis song, is stuck in one chaotic loop that Lucy feels the need to untangle in order to know what his future might have been.

Fred's state of becoming is precisely why Lucy has difficulty ascribing meaning to the affective marking Fred had impressed upon her in the past, meaning their relationship as it may have been in the present-future is concealed without access to further context or explanation from Fred himself. A chance to listen to Fred's music a second time, after his death, does not help her uncover anything, either, and only incites an intense moment of grief for Lucy. She steals Fred's CD case from his bedroom, and she listens to some of the music while on a road trip with her father, Sookie the fisherman, and her neighbor Mr. Patterson. Mr. Patterson sees her listening to one of the CDs and asks her if she likes jazz, to which she responds, "Fred liked it… I think" (Allen 259). Even though she had been with Fred on the day he bought the CD she listens to, had heard him listen to it through the window, and had discussed it with him, she still cannot fathom a Fred who would have liked this music because, in her mind, this is still entirely out of character for him. As she becomes more uncertain about their past together, she becomes more uncertain about what their future would have been, saying, "I was never going to look out my window and see Fred dance again. And I would never have fifty more years with my mom, who everyone seemed to know better than I did. I closed my eyes and focused on the cymbal taps" (260). Lucy recognizes that their relationship was built on what she knows about him, and she mourns the loss of a future that might have made sense of the confusion she felt at seeing him dance for the first time. By mentioning the fact that other people knew her mother better than she did, she seems to situate herself as the person who knew Fred as well as other people knew Helen. In his absence, all she can do is listen to the music and think about how her memories conflict with the cymbal taps that now mark her in a present-future where Fred no longer can.

The Line Tender is an exploration of Lucy's compounded grief after Fred's death, but her already sophisticated understanding of her grief over Helen highlights the tumultuously non-linear nature of grief, especially when it comes to grappling with notions of building on

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the past in order to move forward in the present. Even before Fred's death, Lucy theorizes that her grief manifests itself as a circle with an ebb and flow in intensity, almost like an ocean wave. Thinking about her mother, she narrates, "[M]y grief for her was like a circle. I always came around to missing her again" (Allen 27). After Sookie brings a great white shark body to shore in his fishing nets, the local news station airs a recorded interview with Helen to dispel fears about sharing water with sharks. It's the interview that causes Lucy to think that "the circle had begun again" (31). Helen cannot affectively mark Lucy in the present, but the fixed image on the screen calls forth memories of Helen and sparks Lucy's grief over the lost relationship and connection all over again. Later, she thinks, "Seeing her on the screen was like being with her in a dream and wanting the dream to last for hours. […] I wished I could remember her words exactly" (34). This realization, that the marking from the interview only simulates a dream and is insufficient for replicating the relationship that could exist in the present aligns with her metaphorical task of reading the divers' signals; while the interview is a form of communication from underneath the surface of the waters that are Helen's death, it is not nearly as effective as personal, face-to-face, in the present communication.

As a working adult and mother, Helen is less of a transitional figure than Fred is in Lucy's mind. This is not to say that adults, and mothers specifically, have a fixed identity and children do not; instead, it highlights Lucy's position as someone with knowledge gaps about those around her, especially her mother who died when she was so young. In Lucy's memories, Helen is a mother and a shark biologist, and that is all that really matters to her. Lucy even admits this, narrating, "[W]hen she was here, I never paid much attention to what she did when she wasn't with me" (Allen 354). Perhaps more poignantly, when she visits Helen's old mentor and sees her picture on his wall, she thinks, "It was so odd to see her here in this old man's house. I knew she had a life outside of us, but here was the evidence" (230). Far from villainizing Helen for working and having ambitions, which is often a punishment for mothers who dare to pursue their own desires (Kapurch 42), Lucy does not recognize the nuances within her mother's identity, even if she does hint at them early in the novel. When narrating what her mother did as a shark biologist, she says, "I mostly thought she smelled like fish. No matter how hard she scrubbed, when I hugged her, the smell was always there" (Allen 10). Lucy's recollection of the smell reads as negative; it is a scent she catalogues as a nuisance that taints their physical connection and affection. Without realizing it, Lucy sensorially experiences the interaction of Helen's roles even if she mentally cannot comprehend this. Her lack of understanding makes the interview that Lucy sees on the news a signal that is just as difficult for her to read as the jazz music. Though her first watch of the interview incites such strong emotions in Lucy that she feels sick to her stomach (30), a second viewing of it forces Lucy to confront her perception of her mother as only shark biologist or mother at any given moment; it unifies the two parts of Helen by associating her care for sharks with her care for Lucy. In the full interview, Helen is asked if she has children, and after pointing out that a man would not have been asked the same question, she says, "I am always thinking of my daughter and the line of

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generations that will follow her" (355). Lucy fixates on the "I am always thinking of my daughter" portion of the answer, which reveals how much she feels the need to confirm that she was as important a part of her mother's past as her shark research was. The present tense statement, too, reveals the complicated temporal nature of their relationship. In death, Helen is unable to participate in the present tense thinking that connects her to Lucy, which causes Lucy to lose her affective markings. The interview is a signal that she ultimately reads successfully because, unlike Fred's music, the interview provides her with answers, and it is the clarification of the relationship in the past, contrary to the further obfuscation of her one with Fred, that incites her grief. Now that she has confirmation that she was a central part of her mother's past, she grieves that they can no longer be together in the present-future.

Terrain

As the metaphorical line tender, Lucy's must also read the terrain around her, which results in Lucy surveying the emotional landscapes of her relationships with Fred and Helen and forecasting what those relationships might have developed into were her loved ones still with her. Concurrent with recovering Fred's and Helen's personalities and priorities through interaction with the jazz music and the interview, Lucy maps out the landmarks of her relationships via interaction with a pendant Fred had planned on giving Lucy when he asked her to be his girlfriend and one of Helen's annotated cookbooks. Like with the music and the interview, both items are ones that Lucy must interpret without the mediation of the person who imbued the object with its emotional significance to begin with, but as she works to mediate these objects for herself it becomes clear that part of what she grieves is the companionship she might have had with these two people as she grew into a woman. As she questions what she knows about her loved ones, she speculates about and mourns over the futures she imagines would have seen Fred become her romantic companion and Helen her maternal guide. The pendant, then, transforms into a map of the transition between platonic and romantic, and the cookbook becomes a map to one domestic development that Helen may have eventually guided Lucy through. Lucy's reaction to losing these two affective possibilities is aggressive: she thinks, "I felt angry that Fred and Mom would never know me as a grown woman" (Allen 297). Social worker Audrey F. Parker writes, "children's rage is a normal, healthy, predictable response to having been abandoned and feeling powerless" (71). Lucy feels abandoned as she enters the transition into womanhood precisely because the formation that she had counted on coming from her mother's and Fred's affective markings is now unavailable to her. Without explanation from the person who ascribed meaning to these makeshift maps, the pendant and the cookbook hold a powerful, yet vague, emotional potential that Lucy must navigate as she works to maintain her connection to her deceased loved ones.

The severing of a simply platonic relationship can have traumatic consequences for children, as death's disruption of "everyday companionship" is deeply felt and deeply

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troubling for young mourners (Magnet and Tremblay-Dion 81). As disruptive as the severing of Lucy and Fred's platonic relationship is, more traumatic for Lucy is the fact that the clear romantic potential of their relationship will never be achieved or, at least on her part, further understood. Again, the temporally complicated nature of grief is a roadblock to Lucy's maintained connection with Fred, as her unawareness about Fred's feelings in the past means she cannot confirm that they would have developed romantic feelings in the future. Many adults in *The Line Tender* refer to Lucy and Fred's relationship as "meaningful" (Allen 281, 282, 293, 296), but Lucy does not have the knowledge to decipher this meaning. Fred kisses Lucy before he jumps in the quarry and drowns (106), and when Fred's sister Fiona asks Lucy if they were more than friends, Lucy can only say that she does not know if they were anything more (137). Where Fred's actions fail to clarify where the relationship was headed, a gold mermaid pendant that Lucy finds when she steals Fred's backpack is an indication of where he hoped it would go. Lucy, not privy to Fred's intentions for the piece of jewelry, does not know how to react to the pendant, though, because she is "dependent rather than autonomous" when it comes to reading the emotional terrain Fred had constructed around them (Ahmed 3). Essentially, she needs some kind of legend for reading the map that represents this terrain because her uncertainty about their past makes her question Fred's future, especially when the pendant is an item she never saw him interact with personally.

In another one of Allen's folded and intricate enmeshings of the actual and the metaphorical, Lucy's attachment to Fred finds its manifestation in her claiming and wearing the pendant even when she does not understand its deeper meaning or its connection to her relationship. After "claim[ing] the mermaid as her own" (Allen 154), Lucy ties the pendant on a loop of dental floss and hides it under her shirt because she "didn't want to explain the pendant to anyone" and she "didn't want anyone to try and take it away" (162). On the actual level, her treatment of the pendant reflects the desire of her grief—to (re)claim her connection to Fred and hide it away where people cannot ask her about it and it cannot be taken away again. She physically holds onto the pendant as a way of holding onto Fred. She ascribes this meaning to the pendant even as she admits that she does not know what Fred intended the jewelry to mean; she narrates, "I picked up the Band-Aide tin and looked through all of the toilet paper for a note, but there was nothing. Maybe he figured he's explain it for himself. […] I wanted to ask him what it all meant" (153). Lucy struggles with the metaphorical meaning of the pendant as a future-focused object that would have mapped out the shift in their relationship, and this is seemingly the reason she keeps it hidden. Since she cannot read the deeper meaning, she conceals it just as Fred is concealed from her.

A mermaid being engraved on the pendant is a subtle foreshadowing of Lucy's (re)connection at and with the water, but on the surface, the details of the pendant are what ultimately reveal the deeper meaning of her relationship with Fred. She keeps the gift hidden from the adults around her until a lobster dinner she has with her father, Sookie, and Mr. Patterson. When Fred's mother stops by to speak to Lucy before dinner, she notices

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the pendant for the first time and tells her it was a meaningful gift that Mr. Patterson can explain (Allen 293). This sends Lucy into a fit of rage-filled grief, as the pressure of not knowing what the future-oriented meaning of pendant is, while others seemingly do, finally bubbles over. She screams:

> "I don't even know what the heck it IS?" I yelled, pulling on the necklace and stomping my foot. "I found a box in Fred's backpack, so I opened it and found THIS thing. Maggie said to ask you about it! She said it was a *meaningful* gift! Everyone says that about me and Fred—that there was this deep MEANING. Why can't anyone tell me what the MEANING was?!" (296)

Mr. Patterson, having given Fred the pendant from his late wife's jewelry box, finally gives Lucy the legend she needs to read the terrain around her: "You were his favorite person in the world and he wanted to tell you. […] That's what it means" (299). The pendant stands in for the emotional marking that Fred had hoped to impress upon Lucy when giving her the gift, but instead Mr. Patterson is the mediator instead of Fred. Mr. Patterson, instead of Fred, tells her that he picked out this particular piece of jewelry because its hidden pencil was a perfect gift for a self-proclaimed artist like Lucy (298). The combination of the pendant and Mr. Patterson helps her recognize the deeper implications of her companionship with Fred because they essentially prove to her that he knew her well enough to build a future with her, and this helps her strengthen her hold on the line of her grief that connects her to Fred, and it allows her to metaphorically and physically bring Fred into the present-future where she can stay in constant contact with him.

While the pendant solidifies an understanding of what Lucy and Fred's relationship could have been in the future and reinscribes a heterosexual expectation for coming-of-age, Helen's annotated cookbook becomes a hard-to-read map left behind to give Lucy the guidance she most likely would have received from her mother as she grew up. The cookbook contributes to the terrain Lucy reads in that she must determine what has already been written and inscribed before she became aware of the maternal landscape that she had already been a part of. Blackford writes of "female relics" in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868) that "take on meaning from their connection with childhood, home, and mother," and that these relics "constitute an alternative language" where the mother and daughter can be physically separated while remaining materially linked (2). For Lucy, the challenge is not that she lacks female relics, it is that she never learned the language from Helen that she needs to effectively communicate through the relic. When Lucy first encounters the cookbook, she sees Helen's notes in the margin, thinking, "It was always strange to see her handwriting, to see something that was so distinctly hers and that was still here" (Allen 27). However, seeing this handwriting placed by her mother's hand does not give her the ability to use the cookbook, leading her to realize, "*I gotta learn how to cook*" (28, italics in original). To pause briefly, it is evident that Lucy's parents fall into a stereotypical division of labor where the mother is responsible for cooking, and a critique of these roles is certainly warranted, as is a discussion of whether Lucy's desire to learn to cook forces her into unwanted domesticity. For now, though, I am more interested in the

Standard Periodical Directory Publisher ID# 480178658
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Number: 1286882178

fact that Lucy tries to cook under the tutelage of Helen's handwriting but ultimately fails because the object itself can only partially substitute for the person. Lucy loses out on both the instruction and the affective marking that could have taken place during cooking lessons, and in their place is the grief over having lost that time together. When Lucy's father later opens that same cookbook and decides not to use it because "that's too much work tonight," Lucy thinks, "I knew exactly what he meant" (77). Cooking is not the work that is too much at that moment; encountering Helen's absence through the presence of her handwriting triggers a moment of grief in the present-future, and it is that grief that is too much for them to navigate in the moment. Unlike some of the other objects within the book, Lucy never successfully uses the cookbook, showing that some losses cannot be recovered, even if the metaphorical connection can be.

Equipment

Lucy and Fred's field guide and Helen's research proposal blur the boundary between her metaphorical role of the line tender and her actual role as a shark researcher. The music, interview, pendant, and cookbook all inspire active intake and thought on Lucy's part, but she mainly reacts to their meanings instead of helping to determine them. These two documents become her equipment for staying connected to her loved ones in her grief precisely because they have the potential to be manipulated as one might manipulate a tool to accomplish a task. Both documents are started by one of her loved ones, but it is up to Lucy, at least in part, to finish the texts and accomplish the goals lined out by their creation. The field guide, an extra credit assignment that Fred created for them to do over the summer, is a notebook intended to contain drawings and facts about the flora and fauna of Rockport, and as they work on the entry for the great white shark they rediscover Helen's proposal for studying great white sharks off the coast of Cape Cod that was completed just months before her death. After Fred's death, Lucy struggles to complete the shark section of the field guide, which causes her to look for answers in the proposal. Lucy admits the work that Fred began overlaps with Helen's work, and these combined interests further align and compound her griefs (Allen 202). While the other objects help her identify who the people were like in the past and what their relationships might have looked like in the present-future, the field guide and the proposal lead her to the water as a site of (re)connection in her grief—she reconnects with Fred and Helen by completing their work at the water's edge, and she connects with the water itself as a site of affective marking in the absence of her loved ones.

The grieving Lucy does to understand the past, present, and future of her relationship with Fred finds a practical application as she studies the field guide in order to complete it in such a way that it still honors Fred's original intentions for the document. Where the jazz music and the pendent highlight Lucy's gaps in knowledge about Fred's feelings and emotions, working with the field guide situates Lucy as an expert in Fred's personality as a budding marine biologist and, in her words, "genius." The field guide, too,

Standard Periodical Directory Publisher ID# 480178658
ISSN: ISSN 2770-873X OCLC
Number: 1286882178

conflates the past, present, and future, and demonstrates Lucy's growing ability to navigate her grief through active clinging to what she knows in order the essentially reclaim the connections she has lost. As she, in the present, reads through what she and Fred wrote together in the past, she forecasts Fred's future based on his handwriting: "Everything was printed in Fred's tiny, precise handwriting. His penmanship was a sure indicator that he would have had a future at MIT, the miniscule mechanical pencil marks designed to maximize the amount of cryptic data a genius could record on one page" (Allen 142). She knows he can no longer have that future, just as he can no longer have the future where they are intimate companions, but that only gives her an incentive for continuing his work once he cannot. Though they had been working on it together, Lucy had mainly been responsible for drawing the creatures and Fred had been in charge of data collection and presentation of facts; she claims she is an art person and he is a science person, and this divide shows their attitudes towards water, too. When they go looking for creatures in a cove, Lucy sits on the rocks away from the water while Fred enters the water to collect the specimens for her to draw (68). Completing the guide means she must be the one to look in the water for data, both on great white sharks and her relationship. After she completes the shark section, she narrates, "Even though Fred and I started the research together, the white shark page was blank when he died. I entered all of the text and the drawings myself. I took his words and ran with them. The section was at least five times longer than any of the others. Fred probably would have disagreed with this" (339). Before his death, Fred had written shark facts on a legal pad, which is where Lucy gets "his words" to run with. While ignoring his desired length for the section seems like she is making the document hers and only hers, the fact that she bases it on the facts and information he had preselected shows the opposite is true. It was important to her that Fred's knowledge and touch was in the guide as much as possible, displaying her ability to now actively use an object of emotion as a piece of equipment in her grieving process instead of simply reading something that comes from another person.

The guide, as an object of emotion, marks Lucy because her interest lies not with simply gaining information about her local area but in spending time with Fred as they engage in the work together. The guide serves as a physical, moveable, co-constructed document that allowed them to dwell in their companionship together. This makes her goal of completing the shark section directly tied to a desire to maintain their connection after Fred is gone. She admits that her participation in creating the guide was always about their time together when, after Fred's funeral, she narrates, "to tell you the truth, I had just wanted to hang out with Fred and I didn't think we'd get very far. Maybe I'd been right" (Allen 202). When she acknowledges that she is maybe right about them not getting very far, it speaks both to the task of finding wildlife to document and growing their relationship through the process; because their process was cut short, so was their friendship. Later, when discussing the guide with their teacher, Lucy states they had a rule for including an animal in the guide: they had to have seen it with their own eyes (338). The rule implies that both of them had to be present to see something, supported by the fact that when Fred

Standard Periodical Directory Publisher ID# 480178658
ISSN: ISSN 2770-873X OCLC
Number: 1286882178

wanted to go explore a small tide pool he asked Lucy to go with him (66), which means Lucy would have been unable to include any animals she saw after Fred's death because that's where his summer ended. If the guide documents their relationship as it was that summer, Lucy could potentially lose access to his emotional marking if she finishes the guide. Yet, the shark entry being the one she must complete to fully document their summer only ties her tighter to him, and Helen, because she must deep diver into Helen's research to depict the shark in a lively, realistic way that she feels represents the importance of their connection.

Lucy accomplishes mastery of the field guide as a piece of her equipment as the line tender when she has learned enough about sharks to feel she can accurately portray the movement of a shark's life in a still image. As Lucy practices her drawings, she feels they fall flat, comparing them to "sandbags" (Allen 180). She states that she needs to understand the shark "inside and out," so she turns to a shark textbook to learn more about their inner workings (202). Lucy has only seen a dead great white shark, but she wants to depict life, indicating she knows, on some level, that "life is inseparable from death" (Botelho and Liaw 275), which moves her closer to seeing grief as something that keeps her connected to Fred instead of separating him from her. Once the sharks become something she thinks she can use to keep Fred with her, she then needs to turn to the proposal, as it contains the information she needs to portray the sharks how she would like to. It also invites her into Helen's work, giving her another piece of equipment to utilize as she holds onto her loved ones in her grief.

The research proposal is the lynchpin that holds the plot of *The Line Tender* together; once Lucy reads the proposal and begins engaging in the research, her desire to understand its details drives the majority of her actions. To learn more about the structure of Helen's study, Lucy calls Vernon Divine, Helen's former mentor, but she finds he now suffers from dementia and can no longer speak on the phone. This sets in motion a road trip where Lucy travels with her father, Sookie, and Mr. Patterson to Vernon's home in Maine. Lucy also connects with Dr. Robin Walker, one of Helen's former colleagues, and discovers that her lab is in the final stages of preparation before undergoing Helen's study. Because she has shared her interest in sharks with Robin, she gets invitations to attend a shark necropsy on the beach, as well as an outing to actually tag sharks during the study. Lucy, in essence, assumes Helen's role as a researcher because of the proposal; Vernon even gets confused and calls Lucy by Helen's name (Allen 233). Even as Lucy still works to decipher Fred's jazz music, Helen's interview, the mermaid pendant, and the cookbook—work which requires intensive memory work—Lucy becomes a waking memory of both Helen and Fred by completing their work. The proposal alters Lucy's perception of herself in the present, which helps her encounter her mother's past and present-future. On the ride back to Rockport from Vernon's home, Lucy doodles on a page of the proposal. She narrates, "Part of me looked down in horror at how I had defaced Mom's work, but the other part of me giggled. If I was going to be the census taker, then this was my research paper" (262). Becoming her mother in this one way reconnects Lucy to her, gives her a sense of identity

Standard Periodical Directory Publisher ID# 480178658
ISSN: ISSN 2770-873X OCLC
Number: 1286882178

that is grounded in her understanding of her mother as a scientist, and also reconnects her with Fred, since completing their field guide is the impetus for getting involved in the research in the first place.

(Re)connecting at the Water

As I stated at the beginning of this essay, Lucy's aversion to water is directly connected to the water taking her loved ones away from her and concealing them from her. As a metaphorical line tender, she stands at the edges of the waters of grief and death in order to locate and rescue the relationships that have sunken below the surface. As she does so, water becomes a place that is not entirely comfortable for her but is a site of connection and affective marking as she works in honor of their memory and admits that she never saw her doing such research without them (Allen 347). Her first step towards seeing the water as a site of positive affective marking comes when she, Sookie, and Mr. Patterson go to scatter Mrs. Patterson's ashes in the water. As they go out in the boat, she describes the water as "dark and, in my mind, as bottomless as the quarry" (251). Though she is afraid of the water and what might be below the surface—again, she worries about the presence of sharks that she might not be able to see—she joins Mr. Patterson at the edge of the water as he scatters his wife's ashes and takes his hand. As Mrs. Patterson's body becomes "part of the silt and rocks below" the surface of the Atlantic Ocean (252), Lucy sees an example of someone positively associating grief and death with a watery space. In reclaiming a location where he and Mrs. Patterson used to visit together, Mr. Patterson demonstrates that water can be a site of connection even after the person has passed away. After the shark necropsy, Lucy stands on the rocky beach and watches the tide get closer and closer to the dissected shark body. Standing with her father, Sookie, and Mr. Patterson, she "watche[s] a wave crash onto the rocks, dragging part of the shark out with it. I wondered how long it would take for there to be no trace of the shark. For the rocks to be clean, for the creatures in the ocean to eat the rest of it, for a three-thousand-pound shark to dissolve" (331-2). The water reclaims the body of the shark, something she has grown intellectually and emotionally connected to, and she sees the waves as a kind of cleansing force that will wash away the presence of the shark. By this point in the novel, the figure of the shark has very much come to represent Lucy's grief itself; in deciphering the inner workings of the shark, she deciphers the inner workings of her grief. So when she wonders how long it will take for the water to wash away the shark, she really wonders how long it will take for the metaphorical waters to wash away her grief.

The water cannot fully wash away Lucy's grief, though, because associating her grief with the figure of the shark means there are more sharks for her to interact with, even as one specific shark dissolves in the water. This parallelism comes to fruition when she goes on a tagging mission with the scientists, her father, Sookie, and Mr. Patterson. Lucy, much to the dismay of the adult on the boat, grabs a harpoon and tags one of the sharks herself. She names the shark Fred and the first shark they tag is named Helen. While being chastised for

Standard Periodical Directory Publisher ID# 480178658
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Number: 1286882178

doing something dangerous and potentially damaging to expensive equipment, Lucy comes to a realization:

> I knew this shark as well as any of the adult on the boat. I had drawn its body inside and out—the vertebrae like cartilaginous Lego, the placement of the organs, the fins, and the industrial hinges of the jaw. I knew this shark. I scrubbed one hundred attempts clear with my eraser, trying to get the right distance between the fins or the right amount of muscular girth. And each time I messed up, I was one step closer to understanding how fast this creature moved, how those jaws could pop out like a lizard throwing its tongue to catch a fly. (Allen 365).

The whole purpose of the proposal is to know more about shark populations, their habitats, their migration patterns, etc., or to put it another way, the whole point is to understand them better. If the sharks stand in for grief, Lucy really makes the claim that she knows her grief better than anyone around her. She names grief, she knows its various parts, and she dwells with it so as not to lose the people she has loved. Whereas Helen's proposal finds its fulfillment in the tagging and naming of the shark that will provide data for the biologists, Lucy's task as a researcher is accomplished when she recognizes that she has, at least for the time being, identified her grief. Though the water has become a place for her to reconnect with her loved ones because it is the home of the sharks who now bear her loved ones' names, she is still not entirely comfortable around water: as she walks onto the deck of the boat, she narrates, "I still felt shaky on the water" (362). She has identified her grief, but that does not mean she is healed. Because *The Line Tender* presents grief as something temporally-complicated, Lucy's journey is cast as one of constant renegotiation, learning, and discovery about what grief is and means.

The field guide and the proposal obviously find their resolution in the examination and tagging of sharks, but it is worth noting that studying sharks creates parallels to the other objects that provide a sense of resolution. Where Lucy cannot enjoy Fred's jazz music, the "pinging" from the shark tags performs a song that allows her to finally locate Fred. She narrates, "It could have been straight out of Fred's Miles Davis album, where the musicians made sounds that had never been made by instruments before. But for some reason, when Fred the Shark played the notes, I wanted to keep listening" (Allen 369). Even though she is not entirely comfortable around water at the end of the novel, she conquers her fear, in part, because she sees that the water is the home of the sharks, and the sharks are what she needs to receive marking from her loved ones. Helen's interview was all about finding a way to coexist with the sharks despite being afraid of them; by drawing her out on the water during the tagging, the sharks give Lucy a way to coexist with her grief despite her fear of losing her loved ones. The pendant, too, finds a parallel when Lucy attends the shark necropsy. She finds it remarkable that the biologists find meaning in dissecting the various parts of the shark, and this parallels the moment when Mr. Patterson informs Lucy that the pendant is actually a pencil. After showing her how the pencil works, he says, "Fred thought you could use it for your art" (298). Lucy learns that the surface appearance of an object is not the only thing that carries meaning—looking deeper helps you understand the

Standard Periodical Directory Publisher ID# 480178658
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Number: 1286882178

relationship more. The cookbook, meant to highlight Lucy's lack of guidance from Helen, finds its complement in the fact that Lucy learns about looking for guidance in other places while studying the sharks. When visiting Vernon, he tells Lucy to "wait for the seals," meaning the seals will tell her where the sharks will appear (234). Though Lucy yearns for Helen's guidance, just like she wants to jump straight to observing the sharks, she needs to look at those around her for guidance, too. She finds this in her father, Sookie, Mr. Patterson, Fred's mom and sister, and even the biologists. It is not the same guidance and marking she might have gotten from Helen, but it is sufficient in helping her navigate her grief. There are still gaps in her emotional economy—she is always going to miss and mourn Fred and Helen—but that is exactly the point. The objects point her to the water and give her a way to maintain the connection, and they remind her of the lost connection. As long as she has the objects, she is going to mourn the relationships they represent. The items help her hold onto the lines of her grief.

Conclusion: Holding Onto Grief

As Lucy recounts her experience sitting under a blanket while her father conducted a search-and-rescue dive to recover Fred's body from the bottom of the quarry, she narrates:

> In the back of the ambulance, with Fiona, I had tried to imagine a string that wrapped around my hand. It had threaded out the door of the truck. It had crossed the dirt path and avoided the feet of those watching the rescue efforts, draping over the cliff. It had dropped into the water, the end of the string moving toward Fred like there was a gravitational pull. And when it found him, the string curled around Fred's wrist. I held line. (Allen 119).

This is the image of grief Allen presents: she encourages readers to hold onto grief, to view it as a tool for (re)connection instead of a means of separation. Grief curls around those who have been lost, but it is the thing that those left behind have to grasp onto and not let go of.

Through my analysis of *The Line Tender*, I have sought to make sense of the layered and complex metaphors and actions Allen incorporates in her novel. Lucy's use of objects of emotion show that grief is a temporal action that uses memories as the basis for mourning a future without a deceased loved one. Second, the objects allow Lucy to act as a metaphorical line tender because she stays connected to her loved ones after they have passed away, and she does so by reading the signals they send her from the past, the relational terrain they have established for their companionship, and the equipment that allows her to be an active participant in the recovering of her relationships. By coming to have a deeper understanding of the inner and outer workings of great white sharks, she holds onto Fred and Helen by connecting with their hobbies and passions at the water's edge, which situates watery spaces themselves as a site of connection even as it is also a site of concealment. The ending of the novel is clear, Lucy has not overcome grief; instead, she

Standard Periodical Directory Publisher ID# 480178658
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Number: 1286882178

works alongside it and grief itself is what keeps her connected to those who have passed away.

In closing, then, it is crucial to return to the idea that death and dying in children's and young adult literature represents social and cultural beliefs and that these beliefs serve some purpose for educating or enculturating young readers. Allen's depiction of a child's grief as nonlinear and semi- or entirely permanent contrasts with how many scholars write about the goals of bibliotherapy. Chaston writes that the appeal of *Bridge to Terabithia* to young readers is that it provides them a model for how to "get over the death of a friend" (238), but that the real strength of the book is that it "does not ask the reader to dismiss the pain of death or forget about it" (239). In this one argument, there is the tension of whether books with death should be about overcoming grief or dwelling with it as long as necessary for the griever to feel soothed and healed, whatever it might mean for that individual to be healed. Culturally, Coats asserts that YA books are more and more frequently presenting death as impermanent (3). *The Line Tender* does not present death as temporary, but it counters widely-held beliefs that grief should be temporary. Allen centers critical engagement with emotions and memories as a way forward that values maintains the lost loved ones' contributions in an emotional economy that can still impress meaning and markings upon those left behind. Lucy's journey is not one-size-fits-all, but she can teach readers to find their own metaphors and sites a (re)connection. Her's is being a line tender and toeing the edge of the water, but the real core of this novel is that careful examination of relationships in the past lead to a rich connection in the present-future.

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