

## **Becoming the Ghost/ly: The influence of Death on Spatial Experiences in *Wintergirls***

Article DOI:

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Noesis Literary Volume 3 Issue 1 (Jan-June) 2026, pp: 01-14

ISSN: 3048-4693

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### **Abstract**

The trope of death and the figure of the dead have been read through different frameworks across genres in YA fiction. In realist fiction, the dead character steers the protagonist towards realisation and maturity (Trites 119); in horror fiction, the “cartoon”-esque dead figures negate the seriousness and actuality of death (McCarron 190); and in contemporary mental illness narratives, the characters who died by suicide push the living towards “empathetic responses” instead of “despair” (Coats 11). These studies illustrate how adolescents make sense of death in relation to the mediating figure of the dead. This article will examine how the figure of the dead in Laurie Halse Anderson’s novel *Wintergirls* returns as a ghost or a “haunting subject” (Davis 2007) and influences and mediates the protagonist, Lia’s experiences and perceptions of the built environment around her. Lia’s sensory perceptions of her deceased friend Cassie’s ghost at seemingly ordinary places, like her bedroom or the convenience store, evoke discordant feelings of fear and dread, indicating a tension/disconnect between the assigned meaning of such everyday lived spaces and her emotional responses towards them. This paper demonstrates how Lia’s experiences of such spaces are coloured by her repressed grief of losing her best friend. This grief manifests in her everyday lived spaces, thus transforming the familiar built environment around

her *unheimlich* (Vidler 1987). This gets resolved only after Cassie's ghost disappears. I argue that Lia's discordant spatial experiences, coupled with her self-harming practices, can be read as a process of becoming the dead, and by extension, ghost/ly. Conversely, by focusing on the fluctuating agency between the protagonist and the figure of the ghost, this article considers the ghost/ly as that which blurs and extends the boundaries of the protagonist's body.

Keywords: death, ghosts, figure of the dead, space, perceptions of space, spatial experiences, agency, body.

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### **Introduction**

In 1999, Gail Radley published an article in *The ALAN Review* titled "Coping with Death in Young Adult Literature" that talks about how YA literature features novels that depict death and coping with death in more nuanced terms. However, much has progressed in YA literature since the beginning of the twenty-first century. Death is no longer a sensitive topic for adolescent consumption; themes of death and dying in YA literature have received much attention and a lot more finesse than before. Roberta Seelinger Trites, in her book *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature* (1999), writes that YA fiction uses death as a trope to make the teenage protagonist aware of the mortality of their lives. Simultaneously, the acknowledgement of the finality of death empowers them and pushes them towards maturity and realisation. This shows how death and dying in YA literature are no longer ascribed to generating pity and sympathy, but work to generate discussions on mortality, coping, and grief among adolescent readers. Charlotte Taylor, in her paper titled "How writers use ghosts to explore grief in contemporary YA fiction" (2023), observes how contemporary YA fiction uses the figure of the ghost to initiate discussions on death and grief. She contends that YA authors use the figure of the ghost and the medium of the ghost story in creative ways to depict how grieving can be depicted in multifarious ways, and that the figure of the ghost does not always necessitate an element of fearful spectral presence. Her article shows how contemporary YA fiction no longer considers death as something to be terrified of, but an avenue that can unfold myriad ways of comprehending the phenomenon of death and the aftereffects of facing death.

Taylor's article also foregrounds another concurrent theme associated with death, i.e. the figure of the ghost. While death and dying work to foreground the role of mortality or coping up or even power in adolescence, the figure of the dead child or the ghost destabilises adult-normative views on mortality and an adult-imposed definition of adolescence. Michelle J Smith, in her chapter, "Dead and ghostly children in contemporary literature for young people" (2017) looks at contemporary Gothic fiction for young readers to examine how the figure of the dead child or the ghost child works to "critique or remedy adult actions" (192) where the ghostly children "serve as reminders of the passage of time, and of the adult failings that have produced historical wrongs" (194). This shows how adolescent fiction does not consider death as the end-all of human mortality, but continues to understand and comprehend it in atypical ways.

Karen Coats also takes a similar stance when she argues that contemporary YA fiction has moved beyond the idea of looking at death as a final destination. In her paper "From Death be not Proud to Death be not Permanent", she writes of the kaleidoscopic turn to look at the functions of death in YA fiction. She states that while the plot devices used in YA novels to talk of death are similar (death of a friend/sibling/parent), the approaches to looking at it have changed/keep changing, and thus elicit "new patterns of function and responses for characters and the readers" (Coats 2).

Coats's meditation on the multifarious functions of death across genres in YA literature, in her chapter titled "In the U-Bend with Moaning Myrtle: Thinking about Death in YA Literature", enables her to observe that "the characters who die are most often either socially or psychologically abject. That is, they are characters who disturb our sense of what constitutes, in Kristeva's words, a "clean and proper" body, be it physical or social (4)" (Coats 111). Moreover, it is the girl figure who often features dead in most YA novels, and this spectre of the dead girl "haunts and distorts the reality of the living in YA literature" (Coats 113).

This paper also deals with one such novel that depicts death and the spectre of the dead girl: Laurie Halse Anderson's novel, *Wintergirls*. The novel begins with the news of a death - the death of Cassie, the protagonist Lia's best friend, who was bulimic. Lia narrates how she was the last person Cassie had contacted the night she died: "In the dead time between Saturday night and Sunday morning, she called me" (Anderson 12). It is only after Lia receives the news of Cassie's death that she listens to the messages Cassie had left behind. Since then, Lia has been overwhelmed by the grief of losing her best friend and the guilt of ignoring her during the last moments of her

life. This grief manifests itself in the ways Lia practices her everyday lived spaces. Every action she performs, or every place she visits, is overshadowed by Cassie's memories, and their shared past shapes her present negotiations with space.

This grief of losing her best friend and the guilt of ignoring Cassie's last calls, coupled with the guilt of surviving her, further triggers Lia's anorexia and self-harming practices. While grief and guilt are the two driving forces that mediate Lia's negotiations with everyday lived spaces, this essay is also interested in examining how the figure of the dead girl accentuates Lia's spatio-temporal disjunctions. As observed by Michelle J Smith, the dead girl in the case of this novel does not return to right the wrongs of an adult; neither does she return to reclaim the reality of the living by haunting them, as suggested by Karen Coats. I argue that the figure of the dead girl, or the ghost, works as an extension of the living protagonist's grief. As a result, the living protagonist's gradual move towards becoming the ghost by resorting to self-cutting and anorexia can be considered as ways the living protagonist attempts to cleave her spatio-temporal reality to accommodate the presence of the ghost.

The essay, therefore, looks at how the figure of the dead girl influences the living protagonist's spatial and temporal experiences in material ways. I use the word ghost instead of spectre to qualify the apparition of Cassie that Lia encounters, after she receives the news of her death. The primary objective is to demonstrate the spatial (and temporal) discordances that the protagonist Lia experiences due to the figure of Cassie's ghost. These discordances exhibit Lia's shift towards the process of becoming the dead, and by extension, the ghost/ly. Because she attempts this transformation through her body and her skin, that is why the ghost/ly can be defined as that which blurs the boundaries of the material body. The first section of the paper will focus on the textual examples that illustrate how ordinary spaces and objects become different for Lia. Whenever Lia loses sense of the domestic spaces around her or when she reconfigures her perceptions of ordinary everyday spaces and objects due to the presence of Cassie's ghost, it demonstrates how the experience of death influences and distorts the protagonist's experiences of inhabiting space. The second part of the paper will focus on these spatial discordances and use them as evidence/proof to show that this is a move towards becoming/embodying the ghost. It will also look at the effect of anorexia and self-cutting on the body, and how that accentuates the progress towards becoming/embodying the ghost.

### **Death's influence on Lia's experiences of space and time**

Before Lia attends Cassie's Wake, she has not seen Cassie's dead body yet, and has only been made aware of her death by snippets of information from others. This loss has been compounded by the unheard voicemails left by Cassie, moments before her death. The voicemails, the news of Cassie dying alone in a motel room, and finally, knowing that her body would be autopsied - all feed into Lia's guilt; she keeps on thinking about Cassie after her death. She asks a series of questions about the process of autopsy, about the status of Cassie's dead body, to finally arrive at the concluding question: where will Cassie go now after she is dead (Anderson 15-16). These questions foreshadow the arrival of Cassie's ghost. It is in Cassie's Wake/burial, after Lia sees Cassie's dead body and hands her the "green see-glass" (Anderson 87), that the figure of Cassie's ghost materialises and begins to haunt Lia. These thoughts about the dead, interspersed with memories and present feelings, show how Lia's present time is heavily influenced by the absent and dead Cassie. Lia's mind is so enmeshed with the thoughts of Cassie and their shared past that she sees everyday objects and spaces around her and weaves a narrative around them to accommodate the memory of Cassie.

This can be best illustrated in the episode when she drives her step-sister Emma to soccer practice. While driving, she passes through "a dying barn with a shattered roof, and a stained mattress shoved up against the speed-limit sign" (Anderson 24). Ordinary spatial markers/objects, such as roads and speed markers, remind her of death. She even uses these everyday spaces and objects to create narratives that are centred around death, like imagining how the overhanging mattress can lead to a freak accident. It is not as if she is unable to process what these spatial markers mean; she sees them and builds up scenarios and narratives that reflect her current situation of processing death. The designs of the built environment do not exert too much pressure on her to the point where she cannot comprehend what they mean, but rather she extends the meanings out of such objects, and spins narratives around them to make sense of Cassie's death and the loss of life in general.

Later on, she stops at the gas station, and a break from her automaton functioning leads her to recall the time she and Cassie got into a car accident. It also reminds her of how that was the first time they admitted her to a psychiatric facility, and how Cassie had supported her back then, "She said I was brave". This illustration shows the temporal discordance that Lia experiences owing to the thoughts of Cassie. While the spaces and objects around her work to remind her of a

past shared with Cassie, they disrupt Lia from fully inhabiting and experiencing her present. She is unaware of her spatio-temporal position and narrates, “I don’t remember driving home” (Anderson 28). Her body functions on autopilot because of her familiarity with the spaces around her. As a result, she can perform actions like driving back home or stopping at the gas station without getting into any accidents.

Once she reaches home, she thinks of how one day, she would come home to discover (by watching the news on TV) that she is responsible for a hit-and-run case, and the body of the deceased victim is still stuck on her car’s windshield. However, this distinction between her imaginary thoughts and the events of her reality blurs for Lia. To be doubly sure that she has not mixed the past and the present, reality and imagination, she cross-checks her car thoroughly to make sure that there are no dead bodies “in the windshield” (Anderson 29). This also foregrounds how her thoughts and actions culminate on the dead/death, thereby proving death’s role in (dis)orienting her spatial and temporal positions in the material world. Haunting here does not occur because of the material ghost, but because of the shared past with Cassie, in the form of memories and narratives. While these memories remind Lia of the absence of Cassie, her deliberate and voluntary attempts to recall the shared past and therefore relive them through narration show that the haunting is also self-inflicted.

Anthony Vidler, in his essay, “The Architecture of the Uncanny” (1987), describes how certain aspects of architecture, particularly of a home, can contain the uncanny. The uncanny, or the *unheimlich*, does not only refer to the homely rendered unfamiliar or strange, but it also means how the uncanny carries within it the idea of repressing the familiar. He analyses Freud’s theory of the uncanny to observe

... the uncanny as a class of morbid anxiety that comes from something "repressed which recurs." Similarly the use of the word *heimlich* in such a way that it extended to its seeming opposite, *unheimlich*, might be explained by the fact that "this uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old-established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression. (Vidler 21)

Vidler’s observations rest on the argument that the uncanny or the *unheimlich* works only when the familiar and repressed fear threatens to come to light. In other words, the uncanny is not just an external physical characteristic of an architectural site; it is the fear of the spilling over of the repressed psyche onto one’s lived reality that renders a space *unheimlich* or uncanny. This

insight works to explain Lia's spatio-temporal disjunctions after Cassie's death. The news of Cassie's death is not unfamiliar: in fact, it is a truth that hits too close for Lia:

There's no point in asking why, even though everybody will. *I know why*. The harder question is "why not?"

I can't believe she ran out of answers before I did. (Anderson 14; emphasis added)

This guilt of outliving her best friend is compounded by every adult asking her if she was okay after she received the news, reminding her constantly that she was Cassie's best friend. Furthermore, when Lia's parents and teachers expressed relief that she was safe and still alive, it reiterates the truth that her position with Cassie could be easily interchangeable, thus rendering death and mortality as an all too familiar experience.

This situation foregrounds how Lia's experiences of time are not linear but affective. Flashbacks and memories of her past with Cassie disrupt her present first-person narrative; temporal disruption extends to her negotiations with the spaces she occupies in the present. The ordinary, everyday spaces that Lia inhabits are rendered *unheimlich* or uncanny primarily because of the "morbid anxiety" (Vidler 21) of repressing mortality. As stated earlier, Lia's grief and guilt over Cassie's death manifest in her experiences of everyday lived spaces: she reimagines ordinary elements in her built environment through the lens of death. For instance, when she goes to school the first day after Cassie's death, the light from the projector in her physics classroom allows her to ponder about ghosts waiting in the dark, bursting to come out in the open:

The shades are pulled and the lights are off in the physics lab so we can watch a movie about the speed of light and the speed of sound and some other garbage that doesn't matter. Ghosts are waiting in the shadows of the room, patient dull shimmers. The others can see them, too, I know it. We're all afraid to talk about what stares at us from the dark. (Anderson 18)

There is a specific kind of haunting at work here: haunting is not exactly the return of the ghost, but a fear of the return of the repressed memories in unassuming times and spaces. For Lia, this fear has been actualised by the news of Cassie's death; her shared memories with Cassie haunt her ever since. This haunting disrupts Lia's spatio-temporal experiences, therefore making her everyday surroundings *unheimlich* (fearful, strange, and unfamiliar).

While Vidler's theory defines how the uncanny is transposed from the realm of the mind and dreams to architecture, he does not focus on the dweller's role in mitigating or influencing the uncanny. Vidler also does not focus on the source of the uncanny itself, i.e., the ghostly apparition in this case. In the novel, Lia anticipates the arrival of the ghost:

The body of Cassandra Jane Parrish is asleep in a cold silver box. They'll dig a hole in the ground and plant her on Saturday.

What about the rest of her, the real Cassie?

I think she's coming here. (Anderson 35)

This anticipation of the ghost and its subsequent haunting set the premise for how the figure of the dead will influence the living protagonist's everyday. Does this ghost have an agency? If so, how does the ghost use its agency to haunt the living? These questions of the ghost and its role in shaping the spatio-temporal experiences of the living person foreground the succeeding analyses in the essay. The next section will establish how Cassie's apparition triggers Lia's transition to achieve the ghost/ly. The uncanny is not just a physical quality attributed to the spaces that Lia occupies, but it extends to Lia's material body as well. Her self-harming practices enable her to achieve this transition to the ghost/ly.

### **The shift to the ghost/ly**

This section will deal with the depictions of Lia's anorexia and how that furthers the process towards becoming the dead. The dead is someone who is no longer alive, who has no perceptions of space and time because they are no longer conscious. By extension, the ghost is a presence which appears only after its material body has been extinguished. The ghost is a presence that is marked by its liminal status, something that exists between worlds - living and dead, absent yet present, and has a form of its own, but no physical, material body.

From the beginning, Lia describes her body in distant, objective terms such as "this body", "skin bag of bones", as if the object (the body) does not belong to her. Despite having a material or physical presence to it, Lia is never able to see her body in positive terms and continues to leash it according to her expectations. There appears to be a kind of narrative distancing between her self and her body. She sees herself as someone not constituent of her corporeal, material self, but as someone who acts separately and against the material, corporeal body. This is noticeable when

she mentions how her body, as a physiological unit, acts on its own sometimes to sustain itself from degeneration, by projecting hunger and wanting to eat whenever there is food around:

I could eat a handful of these seeds, or six handfuls, or I could pour a bucket of them into me.

No, I couldn't. I just eat six seeds: 1.2.3.4.5.6. They feel warm going down my throat, not scary.

I hear a door open, but I can't see it. The puppet strings of *this body* are cut and I can't feel these hands, or stop them from peeling the paper wrapper off the cupcake and shoving it in me. This mouth chews and swallows and hurry because here comes another and another until all the red-seeded cupcakes are gone. Every. Single. One. (Anderson 203; emphasis added)

The dichotomy between feeling hungry and refusing to eat encapsulates Lia's struggles with her body: she wants her body to look a certain way, yet it evades her control. Whenever hunger overtakes her, she loses control of her body. Throughout the novel, Lia's struggle of wanting to eat versus refusing to eat is depicted through the use of strikethrough, as can be seen in this example:

~~I'm hungry I need to eat.~~

I hate eating.

~~I need to eat.~~

I hate eating.

~~I need to eat.~~

I love not-eating. (Anderson 145)

This juxtaposition of "need" versus "hate" shows the internal strife in Lia's mind. It is as if striking out the words committed to paper, followed by reasserting their opposites, represents how she strengthens her resolve to control and maintain the empty state of her body: "Empty is good. Empty is strong" (Anderson 7) is the mantra she lives by. The dichotomy of how her body functions as a physiological unit versus her wish to attain the lowest possible weight can be read as a move towards embodying the dead.

Wanting to be the thinnest girl, wanting to avoid her body's automatic responses, wanting to control the shape and size of her body can be seen as tactics by which she wishes to reduce her body to oblivion. She does not see her body as a concrete entity that belongs to her, but rather as

an object that needs to be reduced to its smallest possible dimensions such that it can only exist as a form and not an actual, physical body. This way of looking at the body as a form that constantly needs to be changed can be equated to the definitions of a ghost. Just like the ghost is marked by the presence and a shadow of a body (and not an actual, physical body), similarly, Lia also attempts to transform her body into a ghost. Even though she is not dead and exists very much in the real, physical world, her wish to reduce her body to its thinnest and most invisible extent can be read as the move to embody the ghostly.

Reducing the physicality of her body through a controlled decrease of its proportions implies an attempt in reducing the amount of space it occupies. The lesser physical space it inhabits, the more it transforms from being a material body to being a form that constantly keeps changing. In that aspect, it moves more and more towards becoming an entity that is ghostly in nature. Secondly, by transforming into a body that functions on its own, there arises a disjunction between the body and consciousness. Like a dead person who has no perception of space and time, Lia also has brief spells of unconsciousness, where she is unaware of space and time. Her physical body might be shackled to the bed, but her consciousness is aware and awake. In these moments of wakefulness and exhaustion, she sees and interacts with Cassie's ghost.

In the first case, Lia's movements through space become ghostly because she has no awareness of it, and hence no perception of space. In the second instance, her body becomes dead and inert because of the sleeping pills, and her consciousness wakes up to function as a ghost/apparition that is devoid of a physical body. It is also in those times that she encounters the ghost of Cassie torturing her, but she is left in a state of "suspended animation" (Anderson 116) because her body is inert and, by extension, dead.

Strangely, it is the ghost of Cassie who makes Lia aware of her status of becoming the ghostly, when she says, "You're not dead, but you're not alive either. You're a wintergirl, Lia-Lia, caught in between the worlds. You're a ghost with a beating heart. Soon you'll cross the border and be with me" (Anderson 196). It is only when she receives the final confirmation from Elijah that Cassie conceded defeat to her in reaching "dangerland" (Anderson 219) that Lia accepts her status as the "undead" (Anderson 220). In the climactic scene that follows, Lia stares at the "ghost-girl on the other side" (Anderson 223) and cuts herself across her ribs, in an attempt to free herself from her body, thereby taking the final step to transform herself irrevocably/irredeemably into the dead.

### **The curious case of the Ghost and the Ghost/ly body**

The more Lia loses control of her body in terms of its functions, her consciousness, and even her will to survive, the more Cassie materialises, to finally end in a climactic tussle between the two, where Lia *must* hear Cassie out one last time if she has to reclaim the agency and boundary of her own body and stop herself from crossing to the ‘other side’. Once she has done that, only then is she saved, and the sanctity of her body is preserved intact.

Thus, the conscious move of Lia to let go of her body leads her to experience the spaces around her in ways of which she is unaware. In that sense, she is in the process of becoming the ghost/ly, by having a negligible and also a nebulous presence. One can experience space only when they are able to perceive it and make sense of it. In the case of Lia, her perceptions of space begin to appear shaky and nebulous, as if she is present but not really there. She is also unable to make sense of the spaces/built environments around her, as she often mentions moving on autopilot. The memory of perceiving/experiencing space still remains, but her knowledge or awareness of it gets lost. This can be characterised as a move towards the ghostly, and by extension, the ghost, where her presence and material body are both absent and present, and she occupies a liminal in-between position with respect to the surroundings that she is inhabiting. Her material body exists in the physical world around her, but she is unaware of it because of her brief spells of unconsciousness.

Contrastingly, Cassie’s ghost becomes more and more discernible as Lia loses control over her body. According to Colin Davis, the existence of the ghost or as Abraham and Torok call it, the ‘phantom’, is dependent/contingent on the feelings of shame and prohibition that it generates in the haunted subject. As a result, they appear as unspeakable, because the haunted subject cannot/will not speak about it. Davis quotes Abraham and Torok’s conceptualisation of the phantom, and writes, “It is not at all that they cannot be spoken; on the contrary, they can and should be put into words so that the phantom and its noxious effects on the living can be exorcised.... Abraham and Torok seek to return the ghost to the order of knowledge” (13). Cassie’s ghost was mute when she first appeared before Lia. The ghost was restricted solely for Lia’s eyes, because Lia feared the secrets that the ghost might reveal, about itself as well as about her deteriorating condition. Thus, the ghost elicits shame in Lia because it serves as a reminder of what Lia is guilty of, and is therefore kept under prohibition because the knowledge of Cassie’s presence as a ghost will unravel the downward spiral that Lia has plunged into.

It can be observed that Lia's journey in the novel begins with hiding the existence of the ghost to finally speaking about the ghost, thereby enabling her to exorcise herself from the 'noxious effects' of Cassie's ghost. This whole idea of seeking to return the ghost to the order of knowledge is notable. There occurs a shift/progression in the novel to change the status of the ghost from being a secret—and a toxic one at that—to finally be able to reveal (quite desperately and frantically) the presence of the ghost and the haunting, thereby enabling the ghost to come into existence through knowledge. While earlier, the ghost was made known to the reader only through the singular haunting episodes of Lia, the final revelation of Lia about Cassie's ghost to the psychiatrist marks a shift from ignorance to knowledge (Anderson 247-248). This shift allows Cassie's ghost to dissipate at the end.

### **Conclusion**

Thus, it can be seen how there no longer remains a solid boundary in terms of constructing Lia's body. From the beginning, Lia tries to obliterate the boundaries and the materiality of her body. What remains inside (blood) is projected outwards onto everyday objects and spaces with the use of metaphors around the word blood. What exists outside the body (dirt) is able to pass through her body. What thus remains of her body, according to Lia, is empty. Her wish to maintain this nebulosity of her body is accentuated by her choice not to fill her body with any food, because they would "pollute [her] insides" (Anderson 7).

The question of agency, too, becomes fluid and nebulous as, towards the end, Cassie's ghost defies Lia's agency and haunts her at public places like the drugstore or the psychiatrist's office. The ghost also talks to Lia, telling her to "hurry up" and join her in the afterworld. The climax of the novel takes place in the same rundown motel where Cassie was found unalive. Lia is in the final stages of battling life and death: she has overdosed on pills, her body is almost giving up on her, and Lia is shown struggling to make sense of her bodily actions or her body's spatiotemporal orientation. Cassie's ghost appears at this time, and there is a final conversation/confrontation between them. Cassie's ghost informs Lia that she is dying, clinically narrating how her body is gradually shutting down. Lia, however, continues to fight for her life, and in a final bid to make peace with Cassie, insists her to list all the things she misses in the living world:

"Quick," I say. "Tell me what you miss the most."

"What?"

“What do you miss about being alive?” (Anderson 272)

Cassie’s list of all the things she misses starts from talking about her parents to reminiscing about sensory experiences she had when alive. This final conversation marks the resolution: Lia and Cassie apologise to one another, and the disappearing ghost of Cassie directs Lia to the payphone, thus bidding her goodbye. The climactic conversation made Lia realise that she does have a choice. By fighting to regain the boundaries of her body and her agency back from Cassie, she finally sends the ghost to the ‘other side’ and bids her goodbye (Anderson 272-3).

Once this resolution is reached, Lia considers herself “thawing” (Anderson 278) and slowly moving towards reclaiming her body and her life. She states how she occasionally sees Cassie’s ghost every now and then, but the ghost has returned to being a mute presence and is now rather benign, just watching her from a distance. The burial of the dead has finally occurred, and Lia can finally progress towards recovering her body from the ghosts of her dead best friend, and her self-harming behaviour. This burial of the dead also allows Lia to regain control of her spatio-temporal reality. She does not have to accommodate the ghost in her spatio-temporal reality anymore, as observed towards the end of the novel, where the ghost has become a non-interfering mute spectator, only inhabiting space from a distance: “She shows up now and then but rarely says anything. Mostly, she watches me knit” (Anderson 277). This regained control of her space simultaneously allows her to regain control of the material dimensions of her body. Earlier, she worked towards negating the materiality of her body by withholding food and cutting her skin. But after her last goodbye to the ghost of Cassie, she relearns to accept the materiality of her body by seeking professional help against her self-harming practices. When she actively strived to attain the ghost/ly, her sense of space/time became more conducive to containing the ghost/ly. But now, when she has bid her final goodbye to Cassie, she has begun to relearn her body and accept its materiality by seeking help for her anorexic habits.

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