

“The Borders Between Things”: Grave Liminality in *The Graveyard Book*

A graveyard is a borderland, a physical place situated between the world of the living and the world of the dead. When a young toddler wanders into the local graveyard, he crosses a threshold and experiences a liminal reality. His experiences there give him a family, teach him skills known only to the ghosts, and ultimately aid him in defeating evil.

In my paper, I discuss the in-betweens of *The Graveyard Book*. I begin my examination by introducing the concept of liminality, and how it serves psychosocial maturation. When Bod escapes into the graveyard, he is adopted into the ghost community, and the graveyard becomes as liminal location for him to undergo this maturation. Here, I look to Island Theory as it relates to liminality. The insular graveyard functions as a supernatural island, surrounded by the natural world, causing Bod to develop a fundamentally unique perception of both the natural and supernatural.

After his time with the ghosts and other graveyard denizens, Bod learns their liminal skills, allowing him to turn invisible, manipulate the emotions of the living, and even enter their dreams—another realm of liminal experience. Through his powers, Bod induces a rite of passage in others, creating a change in the psychosocial understanding of his victim. Bod functions as both a protagonist who experiences psychological and social change, and a catalyst for the same in other characters.

Lastly, I examine the other characters of the graveyard, starting with the Honour Guard, who protect “the borders between things,” the liminal transitions of the world. Its members, Silas, a vampire, and Lunescu, a werewolf, occupy a threshold. This puts them both at the crossroads of human and not-human, the borderline guardians of borders. The Sleer, a triple-headed snake, straddles the binary of good and evil, befriending Bod but injuring others. It is both a singularity and plurality, a pagan godhead that pulls Jack into a liminal plane of existence, effectively killing Jack while simultaneously protecting him forever.

I then close with a statement on the value of fantasy and liminal experiences, suggesting the importance of their contribution to literature.