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# Only a Body “Who nobody owns:” Adolescent Identity in Neil Gaiman’s The Graveyard Book

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Only a Body “Who nobody owns:”

Adolescent Identity in Neil Gaiman’s *The Graveyard Book*

by

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Thesis

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Eastern Michigan University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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in

Children’s Literature

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## Abstract

Neil Gaiman's *The Graveyard Book* presents a child, Nobody (Bod) Owens, who grows up in a graveyard with ghosts and a vampire as primary guardians. While Bod is not technically an adolescent for the entire novel, he is constantly struggling with adolescent themes—primarily being in a liminal state—and the graveyard provides a heterotopian space for Bod to escape “normal” society and to develop an “othered” identity. Gaiman's strategic use of monsters reflects adolescence as he presents the repressive human organization, the “Jacks of All Trades,” trying to control society, while Bod becomes a queer monster/human hybrid representing the resistant individual. It is as Bod transitions between the worlds of the living and the dead that he becomes aware of how he does not fully belong to either, and he must come to terms with his own liminal otherness. Gaiman displays how an adolescent can develop and grow to become anyone he wants, even Nobody.

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## Introduction

The terms “adolescent literature” and “young adult novels” are used to classify books that, similar to their characters, just seem to not belong anywhere else. The category of adolescent literature is increasingly difficult to define. Are adolescents the target audience of such books? Maybe, but they are definitely not the only ones reading them. Perhaps the label is based off of the subject matter. The protagonists of these books are usually of an adolescent age; therefore, we might use that criterion to label the book. While there are certainly loose definitions of this literary category, one thing is certain: the adolescent characters depicted within these books are rarely, if ever, “normal.”

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “normal” in many ways. A significant definition to this thesis is: “Constituting or conforming to a type or standard; regular, usual, typical; ordinary, conventional.” It is a given that such a term changes from place to place, culture to culture, being constructed as whatever is the norm within each respective society. The fact is that, while this term might be thrown around excessively, there is no such thing as normal. Works of adolescent literature question what is normal because they often depict and comment on societal norms and push to break through these constructed boundaries.

Many scholars have attempted to define the genre of adolescent literature. Roberta Seelinger Trites, a well-known scholar within the field, discusses the definition of the genre in *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature*. She notes that it was not until the twentieth century that G. Stanley Hall coined the term “adolescence” to recognize as a state in personal development, and so it was around this time that books were first specifically written and marketed for adolescents. Trites explains, “The American Library Association classifies adolescent literature into three categories: ‘Books Written

Specifically for Adolescents,’ ‘Books Written for General Trade Market Which Have Adolescent Heroes and Heroines,’ and ‘General Books of Interest to Young Adults’” (7).

From these classifications it seems that almost all books can be considered adolescent literature. Yet, if everything can be classified as such, can it be possible to create a category of books titled “adolescent literature?”

A prominent aspect within works of adolescent literature is identity, specifically the identity development of the protagonist within a novel. Adolescence is traditionally thought to be the time when one “finds oneself,” or discovers who he or she really is. Meanwhile a prominent feature of adolescence is that one is in between childhood and adulthood – liminally straddling the two categories while belonging to neither. In “The Ethics and Practice of Lemony Snicket: Adolescence and Generation X,” Laurie Langbauer writes, “An identity that is sometimes child, sometimes adult, but also both or neither is... ‘young adult’ or ... ‘adolescent’” (504). In other words, adolescence is a liminal state where we place people that do not fully belong to the age categories of child or adult, just like “their” books. Liminality is defined as being on a boundary or embodying a transitional state—such a state is one every adolescent experiences. Langbauer continues to say that marketing to both children and adults “confirms adolescence as a representational frontier, one that encompasses the otherwise irreconcilable categories of child and adult” (505). When we think of a child, we automatically think that he or she is not an adult, and vice-versa. Adolescence seems to bridge that gap, connecting two very different states. This connection is conveyed clearly and significantly through works of adolescent literature, a category which is intended for a specific audience but actually reaches beyond it.

A common trope within these stories that resist categorization is to strive for this unachievable normalcy. In the adolescent struggle for identity, one is constantly searching for somewhere to belong, desiring to appear “normal” to his peers, parents, etc. As Angela Oswald describes in “Erik Erikson and Self-Identity,” this stage is what Erikson theorizes as the first life “crisis” of adolescence, the crisis of identity: when an adolescent struggles to find a balance between developing a unique, individual identity while still “fitting in” or being accepted by peers. In Neil Gaiman’s novel *The Graveyard Book*, such a crisis becomes even more difficult when a human orphan is adopted by ghosts, lives in a graveyard, has an undead guardian, and a werewolf for a nanny. The liminal protagonist of this novel is appropriately named Nobody (Bod) Owens. What makes this story unique is that Bod never struggles with the desire to be “normal.” He has other struggles, which I will elaborate on throughout this thesis, but trying to fit into some societal construction of normalcy is never one of them. Bod grows up in a graveyard surrounded by ghosts, is constantly referred to as the “live one” by his cohabitants, and appears to accept this life of otherness as normal. He is aware of his differences from everyone that he interacts with (living, dead, or otherwise), but never seems to want to change.

Gaiman’s *The Graveyard Book* is also a great example of how the genre of adolescent literature is changing, and becoming not just for adolescents. It is within adolescent literature that we find certain authors that breach as many boundaries as their subjects and characters. Neil Gaiman is a prime example; he is a crossover author who escapes definition and categorization as much as the category of adolescent literature does. He is popular among a wide variety of audiences—known for both adult and adolescent works, as well as younger children’s literature, comics, graphic novels, and screenplays.



*The Graveyard Book* in particular has won many awards, some classified particularly under Children's Literature, and others awarded to "adult" literature as well. If you explore Gaiman's website, you will find the following description under "*The Graveyard Book*:"

'The Graveyard Book' has won the UK's Booktrust Prize for Teenage Fiction and the Newbery Medal, the highest honor given in US children's literature, as well as the Locus Young Adult Award and the Hugo Best Novel Prize. The awarding of the 2010 UK CILIP Carnegie Medal makes Gaiman the first author ever to win both the Newbery Medal and the Carnegie Medal with the same book. (mousecircus)

The Hugo award is not attached to a specific age group, but is awarded to adult and children's books alike. Meanwhile, the fact that the Newbery Medal is exclusive to the US and the Carnegie Medal to the UK displays even further how diverse and liminal Gaiman really is as an author who reaches multiple audiences. During his tour for *The Graveyard Book* he was asked if he writes with children or adults in mind as the target audience, and he responded, "Mostly I write with me as an audience. ... Mostly I let publishers figure out who I write something for. I don't think that's my job. My job as a writer is to explode" (Gaiman). His explosion of brilliance within his works often contributes to the difficulty of classifying his books.

*The Graveyard Book* caused just such a classification difficulty in the marketing process. In the US it was originally classified as a children's book, while in England it was marketed separately to both children and adults through different versions. The US children's and England's adult versions are the same with all illustrations by Dave McKean, while the children's version in England was published with illustrations by Chris Riddell.<sup>1</sup> There has

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<sup>1</sup> The version with Riddell's illustrations "was also shortlisted for the CILIP Kate Greenaway Medal for illustration – the first time a book has made both [CILIP] Medal shortlists in 30 years" (mousecircus.com).

also been an additional version in the US marketed towards adults with a different cover that has no illustration on it (Figure 3). The thought that a text, though it clearly appeals to all ages, needs to be presented differently to each demographic is baffling. Even more baffling is the fact that the two US editions have the same illustrations throughout the text in between each of the chapters but still feature different covers. It seems that while most adults could enjoy something originally intended for a younger demographic, they would not like to admit it, causing the US “adult” cover to appear more sophisticated than the others with no image and only featuring elegant gold text on a black background.

Reflecting his hard-to-categorize author, Nobody Owens develops as a very othered and hard-to-categorize character. A key aspect of what Gaiman does within this text is to challenge the idea of normal, partially by normalizing monsters. He uses traditional monster figures within a secluded, heterotopia-esque place to reveal the humanity within such othered figures. The most significant traditional monster figure within the text is Silas, a vampire. Again, there is the breaking of norms as the term “vampire” is never actually used within the text; what kind of being Silas is becomes revealed by allusions throughout the story. Silas serves as Bod’s role model in how they are both able to cross the boundaries between the living and the dead, between gender binaries, and between a monster/human binary as well.

A large aspect of adolescent literature is how it breaks such binaries and boundaries, both within and outside of the text. In her article “Between Horror, Humour, and Hope: Neil Gaiman and the Psychic Work of the Gothic,” Karen Coats discusses Gothic elements within Gaiman’s works. She writes, “Gaiman often combines humour and horror, which has been the legacy of the Gothic since its inception, and indicates the close relation between fear and humour as two affective responses to incongruent stimuli” (“Between” 78). Gaiman certainly

succeeds in combining horror and humor successfully within *The Graveyard Book* as he opens the novel with the murder of a family and seamlessly transitions to the toddler, escaping his diaper and the house, and crawling off to a nearby graveyard.

It is upon the child's entrance to the graveyard that readers are emerged into what is described by Farah Mendlesohn as a liminal fantasy. Sándor Klapcsik examines Mendlesohn's theory in his essay, "Neil Gaiman's Irony, Liminal Fantasies, and Fairy Tale Adaptations." Klapcsik writes, "Liminal fantasy hides the threshold, suggesting that the boundaries between fantasy and reality are elusive or insignificant" (318). This is exactly the feeling that is provided to the reader through Gaiman's use of fantastic elements. He introduces a murderer, then ghosts as saviors, a mysterious man who can interact with said ghosts as well as the murderer, and finally a certain "Lady on the Grey" who appears as an awesome and intimidating figure, all within the first chapter. As Bod grows within the graveyard and occasionally interacts with other living humans, he moves between the fantastic and ordinary worlds of the graveyard and outside.

Klapcsik continues, "Liminal fantasy evokes humorous and surreal overtones when the story 'refuses the threshold, and so has much greater potential to generate fear, awe and confusion, all intensely important emotions in the creation of the fantastic mode'" (318). These emotions that create the fantastic are an aspect that is significant to Bod's naming within the graveyard, amongst its inhabitants, which I will explain in my fourth chapter. By casting childish magical thinking onto horrific situations within stories, "and taking them to their hyperbolic extreme, we are more readily able to see their absurdity, to turn them into moments for self-deprecating and subsequently empowering laughter" (Coats 79). In other words, if we can laugh at what is usually "scary," then we can move past fear and find a way

to overcome it. Gaiman employs this technique as he moves from a murder scene into a graveyard where ghosts begin arguing over a living toddler.

It is also significant to note Gaiman's own influences when writing *The Graveyard Book*. In his Newbery acceptance speech he reflects on his literary childhood spent in libraries: "There were no bad stories: every story was new and glorious. And I sat there, in my school holidays, and I read the children's library, and when I was done, and had read the children's library, I walked out into the dangerous vastness of the adult section" (Newbery 2). Taking into account his own love of reading across categories, it is no wonder that Gaiman became such an inspirational, liminal author. Klapcsik quotes Gary K. Wolfe as stating that Gaiman is "far less predictable than most fantasy writers...his most successful works are those that draw on multiple traditions rather than focusing on a redaction of a particular tale or writer" (330). As Gaiman writes with himself in mind as audience, and is known for his use of intertextuality, it is no wonder that he takes influences from many outlets to produce texts that fit within and challenge a broad range of categories and are popular among a large variety of audiences.

Gaiman is also known for his works of adaptation, and he has said *The Graveyard Book* is greatly influenced by Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*. Gaiman reflects on his writing process: "I wanted the book to be composed of short stories, because *The Jungle Book* was short stories. And I wanted it to be a novel, because it was a novel in my head. The tension between those two things was both a delight and a heartache as a writer" (Afterward 5). As much tension as was present in his head, Gaiman succeeded at creating a novel of short stories. Each of the eight chapters within the text can be read as a short story<sup>2</sup>, but they

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<sup>2</sup> One of which is published as a short story in *M is for Magic*.

are so well-woven together (with a prophecy and events that surround it) that they create one excellent novel.

In *The Graveyard Book*, Gaiman creates a character with an interrupted development; this thesis will analyze the constructed identity of Nobody Owens that resulted from that interruption in development. Readers watch Bod grow throughout the text, and while Bod is not technically an adolescent for the entire novel, he is constantly struggling with adolescent themes—primarily being in a liminal state. From the time Bod enters the graveyard he exists liminally by being alive and human while living within a dead world where he has mythical abilities that other living humans do not. It is as he moves between the worlds of the living and the dead that he becomes aware of how he does not fully belong to either, and he must come to terms with his own liminal otherness. Within *The Graveyard Book* Gaiman subverts many conceptions of “normal” with his repurposing of mythical creatures to care for Bod and help him find a way to live.

In my first chapter, I will examine the graveyard and the time that Bod spends living within it (with occasional trips outside). The graveyard is as much of a character as Bod, creating a sort of heterotopia for him to escape “normal” society. It is within the graveyard setting that Bod develops powers normally exclusive to the dead and submerges himself within the language of the graveyard; he develops as a liminal figure within the liminal fantasy in which he lives. In “Being Nobody: Identity in Neil Gaiman’s *The Graveyard Book*,” Joseph Abbruscato writes, “Bod’s growth appears at times when he begins to feel overly trapped within the graveyard and fights against his isolation and imprisonment to explore, not realizing the dangers and potential cost such actions and explorations could

have” (70). It is through these moments where Bod ventures out of the graveyard, or deeper into it, that he comes to learn how the graveyard is his home and serves to protect him.

The graveyard provides a place for Bod to develop as a truly liminal figure, with other liminal, mythological figures surrounding him. In Chapter Two, I examine Gaiman’s strategic use of monsters and how they reflect adolescence. Ghosts, a vampire, and a werewolf become protective guardians over Bod, causing him to develop as a somewhat mythological monster figure himself. Gaiman challenges traditional definitions of monsters to show how humans are capable of monstrosity, while at the same time complicating traditional ideas of good versus evil.

What the graveyard and its monsters mostly protect Bod from is the evil, human organization “The Jacks of All Trades” (the Jacks), representing humans as the real monsters we all must worry about. In my third chapter, I explore how the Jacks cause Bod’s otherness from society through a prophecy they are attempting to prevent, allowing him to develop as a queer individual separate from any “normal” society. By viewing the Jacks as figures opposed to the traditional monster figures surrounding and protecting Bod, it is clear how Gaiman works to challenge societal views of monstrosity. Klapcsik discusses Gaiman’s “Snow, Glass, Apples,” which is a retelling of the traditional fairy tale “Snow White” in which Gaiman also challenges common ideas of monsters. He writes, “In Gaiman’s story, in spite of the twisted point-of-view of ‘the wicked stepmother,’ the monstrous becomes once again to some extent marginalized. ... The monster ... becomes ‘the Other’ once more” (328). This seems to be a trend for Gaiman—disrupting cultural ideas of what is monstrous or not. Similarly, he flips these roles within *The Graveyard Book* by writing the Jacks as a suppressive force trying to control society, and Bod as a queer monster figure representing

the resistant individual. It is this identity that Bod comes to accept for himself and to move forward with into the world and out of the graveyard.

In my final chapter I analyze how, through his challenges and adventures, Bod develops as an abject figure. Coats, invoking Julia Kristeva, writes, “what has been abjected doesn’t simply go away” (85). As Bod spent his major developmental years living within a graveyard, he will always have that with him. The Jacks are what cause Bod to become abject, and this is another element that he accepts as part of his identity. When the fantastical elements of the graveyard begin to fade, Bod comes into his own subjectivity and fully accepts his identity as Nobody.

In this aspect, is it possible for Bod to be a successful individual within a normal working society? Trites states, “Adolescent literature is at its heart a romantic literature because so many of us – authors, critics, teachers, teenagers – need to believe in the possibility of adolescent growth” (15). Even with his abjectness, and his completely othered identity, Bod intends on entering the world of the living and living on nobody’s terms but his own. Gaiman has mastered the art of turning the frightening into the humorous, evident in this touching story, and he uses that tension to show how an adolescent can develop and grow to become anyone he wants, even Nobody.

## Chapter I—The Graveyard: In Which Somebody Becomes Nobody

As I state in my introduction, Neil Gaiman opens *The Graveyard Book* with the man Jack committing murder. As Bod's family is being killed, the toddler escapes the house and wanders down the street and into a graveyard on the margins of human society. The graveyard serves as a heterotopia for Bod; it not only offers protection for him, but also assists in creating his identity as Nobody. The entrance into the graveyard serves as the first sign that *The Graveyard Book* is a work of fantasy, but the text successfully keeps the fantastic separated from reality in a way that falls into what Farah Mendelsohn defines as a "liminal fantasy." The readers experience and acknowledge what is fantastic when the protagonist first experiences it, but Bod does not acknowledge the shift into fantasy as anything unexpected. The fantasy world of the graveyard serves to protect Bod, and each of his adventures within (and outside) it helps him realize a little more about himself, in relation to the graveyard and his own fantastic self. It is during this process of self-discovery that Bod becomes able to develop a liminal, othered identity within the socially invisible world of the graveyard.

Gaiman does not begin his text with our protagonist, but rather with the man trying to kill him; the readers are more informed than Bod in this matter because we are witnesses to his family's murder, which causes the readers to know that Bod (as a toddler) needs protecting from this man. As we switch between the perspectives of the man Jack and Bod, the text is defined by the relationship between these two characters. In *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, Mendlesohn writes, "Liminality is created in part by misdirection encoded in the detail ...



Perspective is used to manipulate what we see, to force us to pay attention to the background, sometimes at the expense of the figure” (210). Through transitioning between the man Jack and Bod, readers witness both sides of the action by experiencing these different perspectives. Witnessing the liminal protagonist entering a liminal world, within a liminal fantasy, the readers’ views are manipulated as we are first forced to pay attention to everything that surrounds the protagonist. How the perspective is shifted in the beginning of the text from the man Jack to the figures surrounding Bod as he enters the graveyard reveals that the “real” world is unsafe for the toddler and this (usually frightening) place within the graveyard provides safety for our protagonist, away from those real horrors outside.

Bod enters the graveyard, taking it in and accepting it as ordinary; meanwhile, the reader views the world as fantastic as ghosts and mythical creatures are introduced and begin interacting with Bod, as well as with his recently killed family and the man Jack. Mendlesohn writes, “As with all fantasies of extreme equipoise, it can be read as non-fantastical. We wait, paused, for the fantastic to break through. Instead it becomes difficult to locate where that fantastic element is. Both church and graveyard are promising...The *possibility* of fantasy lurks at every corner” (196, original emphasis). While readers can recognize that ghosts are a form of fantasy, Bod interacts with them as if they are part of everyday life—or normal. Bod leaves behind his death-filled house and enters the graveyard, where the dead are reanimated, and while we would normally expect to be frightened by such figures, it is actually the human outside who is threatening. Again, as Bod is our protagonist and readers are expected to base their reactions off of his, we are provided with more of a realistic feel than a fantastic one.

Bod is human, entering this fantasy world where his kind (the living) are not permitted, but when Bod is found by the spectral Mrs. Owens he finds safety in this loving, undead figure. Mrs. Owens calls her husband over to ponder what should be done with Bod, and Mr. Owens responds, “This here baby is unquestionably alive, and as such is nothing to do with us, and is no part of our world” (Gaiman 13). Mr. Owens’s direct reaction to Bod’s aliveness is a significant point that Bod does not belong with them—and never really will while he lives. The liminal fantasy allows for the fantastic to become ordinary; therefore, the living Bod is what the Owens see as fantastic because their ordinary lives are filled with death. Despite the deathly presence throughout the text, *The Graveyard Book* is a story about *life*, and how fantastic living is. The fact that Bod, a toddler, survived the murderous house he left behind, does mark him as fantastic to the reader as well, and his aliveness is a constant reminder of his exceptionality throughout the text as he is constantly surrounded by death. Nevertheless, Bod is accepted into the society of the graveyard and embodies a (permanently) liminal identity: “We have stepped into a liminal space, the tunnel between portal and portal, between world and world” (Mendlesohn 188). The graveyard is this liminal space – the place for the living to visit the dead and for the dead to rest — in which Bod comes to remain safely inside, between the worlds of the living and the dead.

Bod’s entrance into, and acceptance of, the graveyard coincides with Mendlesohn’s definition of liminal fantasy: within works of liminal fantasy, the protagonist has often learned to accept the world exactly as it is and *as it appears at any given moment*. ... The experience is reduced to the event, not the feeling about the event. In consequence, the surprise, the injustice, the supernatural, is as utterly normal and to be expected—perhaps even more to be accepted than most of

what *we* consider to be normal, because the very act of considering requires *us* to look forward and anticipate. (216, original emphasis)

The readers accept the shift into the fantastic world along with Bod, just as Gaiman presents it. While the readers realize that it is a fantastic act for a living toddler to interact with a ghost, albeit a kind-hearted one, Bod accepts Mrs. Owens as a normal occurrence, a mentality that he continues for the next 14 or so years while he grows up in the graveyard. It is during, and after, this time that the reader is challenged to predict what will happen, what is real versus what is fantastic, and what will become of Bod.

As living humans can and do visit graveyards, we can consider graveyards liminal as a temporary place, a place located on the margins of society. With Bod joining the society of the graveyard, the graveyard functions as a heterotopia, a site where, as Fred Botting describes, “subjects and behaviors that fit only partially within dominant norms can be both contained and excluded” (243). In this manner, it is the fantasy world that seems to be contained within the graveyard’s limits and excluded to the margins of normal, realistic society. But the graveyard also works to protect Bod as he remains hidden from the outside human society that is trying to harm him. Inside the marginalized graveyard Bod can remain safe; he can grow and develop a liminal identity, living on the boundaries of human society as well as between life and death.

Graveyards are not often thought about every day by the average person – they carry eerie connotations, and are where many scary stories take place and/or are told. It is fitting that Bod would find a new home here in the marginalized graveyard, as he has been excluded from the normal human society through the death of his biological family. In “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias,” Michel Foucault discusses the “curious heterotopia of the

cemetery. This is certainly an ‘other’ place with respect to ordinary cultural spaces, and yet it is connected with all the locations of the city, the society, the village, and so on, since every family has some relative there” (353). While Bod’s graveyard fits this description, his heterotopian graveyard seems more other than those that Foucault is discussing, as it has been converted into a nature reserve and hasn’t hosted any burials in quite some time. Bod certainly has no biological family there, nor do any of the humans Gaiman has visit the graveyard. Bod’s graveyard is still connected to the larger human society through being a nature reserve and part of the town’s history, but it is indeed an othered space where Bod can be an othered character.

Botting also elaborates on how a graveyard functions as a heterotopia: “Marking a shifting relationship to natural and supernatural worlds in which the orders of the past remained only as phantoms in the present, the graveyard was not only a space that contested the limits of society: it was also implicated in the constitution of the space of subjectivity as one of infinite extension within and beyond itself” (246). The graveyard represents how death goes on; in the graveyard, Bod will always have a link to death right next to him as he moved there from the scene of his murdered biological family. Bod becomes connected to this world of historical phantoms through his present, orphaned state by being surrounded by ghosts. As he interacts with these ghosts Bod fully develops as a liminal, othered character. He is othered from the outside human society because he lives amongst the dead, but he is also othered from the dead society because he is, indeed, alive.

When Bod is first interacting with the Owensens in the graveyard, the flickering ghosts of his recently killed family appear and his deceased mother pleads with the spectral Owensens to protect her child from the man Jack, who is aggressively trying to enter the

graveyard. We view these dead-undead figures interacting, now aiming to protect the living child, as if this is a normal occurrence—the dead protecting the living. Mr. and Mrs. Owens agree to be parents to the child, and this transfer from one dead-undead mother to another signifies validation of this world that Bod is entering into through the approval of his biological mother. In the article “Between Horror, Humour, and Hope,” Karen Coats discusses mother relationships within works of gothic fiction, and quotes Claire Kahane, writing, “What I see repeatedly locked into the forbidden center of the Gothic which draws me inward is the spectral presence of a dead-undead mother, archaic and all-encompassing, a ghost signifying the problematics of femininity which the heroine must confront” (“Between” 85). In Bod’s case, the spectral presences signify more than problems relating to gender; they signify the need to figure out where Bod fits between a world of life and death. His deceased biological mother entrusts her still living son into the care of another deceased woman, but one who can successfully watch over him and protect him from harm within the graveyard. As Bod has just lost his family, the graveyard is the ideal heterotopia for him to escape to and the Owens are the ideal surrogate family for him to remain on the edges with in order to avoid detection by the man Jack.

Entering a heterotopian world such as the graveyard is a process—and to enter semi-permanently as Bod does requires complete acceptance by the residents of the graveyard. Foucault writes, “Usually, one does not get into a heterotopian location by one’s own will...One can only enter by special permission and after one has completed a certain number of gestures” (Foucault 355). After the initial rescue of the toddler, several of the other graveyard inhabitants begin arguing with Mrs. Owens about how she is going to take care of a living child—again pointing out that a *live* child does not fully belong in their dead world.

In order for Bod to have the ability to live in the graveyard Mrs. Owens suggests that they give the child the “Freedom of the Graveyard,” which is the special permission Bod needs to belong in this society. It is also at this moment when we formally meet Silas, a mysterious undead figure who has also been granted the Freedom of the Graveyard. While first trying to stay out of the matter, Silas is sucked in and takes the side of Mrs. Owens. He states, “For good or for evil—and I firmly believe that it is for good—Mrs. Owens and her husband have taken this child under their protection. It is going to take more than just a couple of good-hearted souls to raise this child. It will...take a graveyard” (Gaiman 23). This outright recognition that it will take the graveyard to raise this particular child convinces the rest of the inhabitants that Bod can belong there, and it also displays both Bod’s liminality and the importance the graveyard (as a place and a community) will have in ensuring Bod’s survival. This place of the *dead* is the only place Bod can successfully *live*.

Similar to Mendlesohn’s discussion of Stanley Yelnats from Louis Sachar’s novel *Holes*, Bod “follows the path of the quest hero: he is ignorant and is educated in the way of the fantasy world” (214). His primary teacher in this fantasy world is Silas. When Bod is about five years old, he asks why he is not allowed out of the graveyard, and Silas responds, “‘Because it’s only in the graveyard that we can keep you safe. This is where you live and this is where those who love you can be found. Outside would not be safe for you. Not yet’” (Gaiman 37). The heterotopian graveyard is a place where Bod can be separate and othered from the evil outside. Silas also clarifies for Bod (and the reader) what his freedom of the graveyard really means: “‘The Graveyard is taking care of you. While you are here, you can see in the darkness. You can walk some of the ways that the living should not travel. The eyes of the living will slip from you’” (Gaiman 38). These liminal abilities make it clear how

the graveyard serves to protect Bod and keep him between the worlds of life and death; as long as he has these powers he will remain invisible to the outside world and to the man who tried to murder him. His abilities, which I discuss further in Chapter Two, are also a mark of his otherness.

As long as Bod lives in the graveyard he will be alive, and therefore different from the norm created within this place. And, as long as he lives in the graveyard, merged with the fantastic, Bod will not be a “normal” human being, living or dead. The fact that he grows up separated from other live humans provides him with a unique liminal identity. His name, “Nobody Owens,” is the first clear mark of Bod’s permanent otherness, and serves as another gesture that allows Bod true access to this heterotopian location as well as protection from the man Jack, similar to his Freedom of the Graveyard. Using “Nobody” as a name follows the long tradition of names as forms of protection, most significantly in Homer’s historic epic, *The Odyssey*, where Odysseus tells a Cyclops his name is “Nobody” in order to escape. Similar to the success of Odysseus’s trick, it is difficult for an enemy to find Nobody<sup>3</sup> in Gaiman’s text. Language is the validator of culture and society; Bod’s naming acknowledges his entrance into the symbolic of the heterotopian graveyard and serves as protection from the man Jack.

Within the safety of Bod’s graveyard home he continues learning the things most children do, like reading and writing, continuing to submerge himself in the language and world of the graveyard. For Bod’s literacy, Silas brings him alphabet books and some early readers from outside the graveyard, but once Bod knows his letters Silas challenges him to find them all within the graveyard. Bod learns language from both the living human society

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<sup>3</sup> Odysseus tells Polyphemus his name is “Nobody,” so when Polyphemus calls for help he is blaming “nobody” and none of his brothers believe him, allowing Odysseus to escape (Homer IX.390-502).

through the books Silas provides, as well as through the graveyard by reading the gravestones—again marking his liminality as he navigates the languages of both worlds. Gaiman writes, “Every day Bod would take his paper and crayons into the graveyard and he would copy names and words and numbers as best he could, and each night, before Silas would go off into the world, Bod would make Silas explain to him what he had written” (Gaiman 39). This act of learning language from the graveyard is another validation of his membership within it. Coats writes how an individual becomes part of a society when he subjects himself to the dialectic of the people: “The individual personality of the subject, those qualities that fill out the structures of his subjectivity, owes its very existence to the Other’s<sup>4</sup> language” (*Looking* 29). Therefore, Bod interacting with the language of the headstones, and developing his own identity through this method of gaining literacy, confirms he is a subject of the graveyard.

Not only does Bod learn language through reading gravestones, but also through interacting with members of the graveyard, many of whom are from different time periods. Foucault explains that:

Heterotopias are linked for the most part to bits and pieces of time, i.e., they open up through what we might define as a pure symmetry of heterochronisms. The heterotopia enters fully into function when men find themselves in a sort of total breach of their traditional time. Then it is easy to see how the cemetery is a highly heterotopian place, in that it begins with that strange heterochronism that is, for a human being, the loss of life and of that

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<sup>4</sup> Coats is referring to the Lacanian “Other,” which represents the societal Symbolic which a child is expected to become part of—I discuss this further in my final chapter.



quasi-eternity in which, however, he does not cease to dissolve and be erased.

(354)

The ghosts that Bod interacts with are evidence of this breach of traditional time where they each act according to the time period in which they lived. Bod becomes able to not only navigate proper uses of language, but he is also able to navigate between different temporal uses of language through his interactions with the various ghosts. For example, when he is about five years old, Bod befriends a young girl, Scarlett, and introduces her to other inhabitants of the graveyard. As Scarlett can't actually see the ghosts, Bod relays their messages to her, such as, "Bartleby says that thou dost have a face like unto a squishèd plum" (Gaiman 43). As Scarlett notes that Bartleby talks funny, Bod explains it as just the way people talked *when* Bartleby comes from. There is no question of Bod's authenticity in relaying the message accurately from Bartleby to Scarlett, and this is evidence of Bod's significant relationship to the graveyard and Scarlett's lack thereof.

Whereas Bod is an accepted member of the graveyard, Scarlett is clearly just a visitor. I mentioned earlier that the graveyard is a nature reserve, where any living human can visit and spend time. The graveyard falls into the classification of heterotopias that "have the appearance of pure and simple openings, although they usually conceal curious exclusions. Anyone can enter one of these heterotopian locations, but, in reality, they are nothing more than an illusion: one thinks one has entered and, by the sole fact of entering, one is excluded" (Foucault 355). Scarlett believes she has entered the world of the graveyard, fully accepting everything Bod tells her, but she never fully becomes a part of this world. Scarlett never obtains the abilities Bod has—such as seeing the dead—and later Scarlett becomes truly excluded from the heterotopian graveyard.

Scarlett enters the heterotopian graveyard, seeming to accept the fantastic almost as easily as Bod did when he was a toddler. The graveyard itself serves as a two-part place: a place for the dead, and a home for Bod where he can be both free and protected. The graveyard becomes discomfiting as it merges the lives of the living, the dead, and some in between. When we think of death as a definite end for the living, we are exposed to an unnatural feeling as fantasy merges with realism in *The Graveyard Book*. In her article, "Putting Down Routes," Katharine Slater discusses identities formed through locality; she quotes Nicola Ansell, saying, "Every encounter of a child with her/his environment encompasses far more than immediate surroundings...While space may appear neutral and contained, it is actually shaped by interrelations that extend beyond any immediate interaction between the child and what s/he perceives" (6). Bod's interaction with Scarlett shows how living in the graveyard has shaped him thus far, and as Scarlett enters the "contained" world of the graveyard, her beliefs are challenged and altered as well. Meanwhile, Scarlett provides a link to "normal" human society for Bod, and, as such, she is another reminder of the liminal fantasy he lives within for both Bod and readers. As Scarlett is the first human Bod really interacts with, he realizes that Scarlett is what is considered normal in the outside world, but she comes to accept Bod and his fantastic world. Scarlett is more like Bod than any of the other beings surrounding him, and he tries to submerge her into his world in order to validate its normalcy. During this process, Bod is also forced to realize his own fantastic limits as he and Scarlett venture further into the graveyard together.

Though she has no problem seeing and interacting with Bod, Scarlett is unable to see any of the ghosts he interacts with, which eases her into the fantastic as she considers the ghosts to be "imaginary," like Bod (as her father suggests when Scarlett tells him about Bod).

While Scarlett accepts her father's reasoning about Bod being imaginary, it is unclear that she or Bod really know what "imaginary" means as she appears to fully believe in Bod's existence. What appears to simply be a child's imagination, as Scarlett's father views it, becomes an actual fantasy experience for Scarlett. In "The Ethics and Practice of Lemony Snicket," Laurie Langbauer writes on adolescent fantasies: "Fantasy, instead of being unseemly or outrageous, becomes the innocent, even touching, fantasy of every adolescent: the fantasy that the zeitgeist culminates in him or her" (509). This idea of innocent, non-outrageous fantasy is strengthened in liminal fantasies such as *The Graveyard Book*, and by having Scarlett easily accept Bod and the world of the graveyard through him, the reader is equally subjected to believe the "normalcy" of it all. This subjection to the normalcy of the graveyard provides yet another shift in what readers actually view as fantastic, as Scarlett represents our world (the living, human world), so we accept what she is experiencing as truth.

With this mentality, Scarlett has very real and frightening adventures with Bod, which she later convinces herself were imaginary. Bod brings Scarlett further into his heterotopia as they embark on an adventure to find the oldest member of the graveyard, who is entombed under a large hill. As they enter the ancient tomb the heterotopia of the graveyard becomes clearer. The tomb is something ancient, like a forgotten ruin, which is an important space within gothic fiction: "Ruins were reconstructed as evidence of a unity between culture and nature, a blending which testified to a permanence and universality not only of the latter but also, by association, of the marks of a human presence in the world" (Botting 247). The idea of blending culture and nature is precisely why Scarlett is there: the graveyard is now a nature reserve where her parents bring her to play. As the tomb Bod and Scarlett are

exploring is actually under a hill—retaken by nature—they venture underground to find the human presence left behind.

As Bod has no problem seeing in the dark he leads Scarlett down a set of stairs and into a small room: “There was a slab of stone on the ground, and a low ledge in one corner, with some small objects on it. There were bones on the ground, very old bones indeed, although below where the steps entered the room Bod could see a crumpled corpse, dressed in the remains of a long brown coat...He must have slipped and fallen in the dark” (Gaiman 52). Bod, being surrounded by death for most of his young life, is not surprised, shocked, or even fearful of the corpse; if Scarlett were able to see it she probably would have a different, less calm reaction. This likely discrepancy in their possible reactions provides an unnerving feeling for the reader who would (usually) have a similar reaction to that of Scarlett, but as we experience the events through Bod’s perspective, the once frightening becomes natural and normal. In this moment, the graveyard seems to be protecting both Scarlett and Bod: Scarlett by being blinded from the horror within the tomb, and Bod by keeping Scarlett othered within the graveyard. If Scarlett understood the graveyard as Bod does she might come to consider it as normal, and with her permanent connections to human society such an understanding could potentially expose Bod to the dangers that the graveyard protects him from.

We witness how Scarlett and Bod are different after their entrance into the tomb, when they first hear a slithering noise and then “Scarlett made a noise that was half gasp and half wail, and Bod saw something, and he knew without asking that she could see it too. There was a light at the end of the room, and in the light a man came walking...and Bod heard Scarlett choking back a scream” (Gaiman 52). As Scarlett has her first real encounter

with a mythical being she becomes frightened; meanwhile Bod is able to keep calm and exhibit his power through asking the “Indigo Man,” ““Who are you?”” as he squeezes Scarlett’s hand to support her. The Indigo Man continues to try to scare them and Bod and Scarlett have the following conversation:

“Is he going to hurt us?” asked Scarlett.

“I don’t think so,” said Bod. Then, to the Indigo Man, he said, as he had been taught, “I have the Freedom of the Graveyard and I may walk where I choose.”

There was no reaction to this by the Indigo Man, which puzzled Bod even more because even the most irritable inhabitants of the graveyard had been calmed by this statement. Bod said, “Scarlett, can you *see* him?”

“Of course I can see him. He’s a big scary tattooey man and he wants to kill us. Bod, make him go away!” (Gaiman 53, emphasis original)

Scarlett’s ability to see the Indigo Man marks a shift into a more fantastic state than what she and the readers are used to. This change causes Bod to realize that this creature is not one of the beings he is familiar with and that he may not have the same power here as he does in the rest of the graveyard. His relationship is to the graveyard itself, which is where he has power through the Freedom of the Graveyard, and while this tomb is connected to the graveyard it is also different; “There is a certain kind of heterotopia which I would describe as that of crisis; it comprises privileged or sacred or forbidden places that are reserved for the individual who finds himself in a state of crisis with respect to the society or the environment in which he lives” (Foucault 353). Even though Bod is accustomed to the fantastic world of the graveyard, this tomb presents such a crisis when he is forced to realize his own power has

limits, and he must find a new way to manipulate the situation and protect Scarlett. It is also in this moment that Bod is attempting to merge his two worlds together, a merger that proves more problematic than Bod hoped.

This situation also displays how the graveyard works as liminal fantasy: Bod and the readers have accepted the graveyard as fantastic (and that fantastic as normal), but stepping into the tomb brings on a whole new fantastic level with the Indigo Man—one a little grander and more ancient than that of the graveyard above. As Scarlett comes to comprehend that this figure is actually present in front of them, she tells Bod, “I’m sorry I said they were imaginary...I believe now. They’re real” (Gaiman 54). She comes to accept Bod’s world as a reality and validates this heterotopia on the edges of her comfortable society, but she is clearly uncomfortable here. As Bod is no longer afraid, and he can sense Scarlett’s terror, he improvises, telling her:

“No...I think you’re right. I think this one is.”

“Is what?”

“Imaginary.”

“Don’t be stupid,” said Scarlett. “I can see it.”

“Yes,” said Bod. “And you can’t see dead people.” He looked around the chamber. “You can stop now,” he said. “We know it’s not real.” (Gaiman 54)

Bod uses his own wits, a human power, to understand that if Scarlett can see this figure in front of them, it must be an illusion. With this knowledge, Bod manipulates the situation and protects Scarlett, exhibiting his ability to accept his power crisis and figure out a new solution. Bod is successful as Scarlett accepts his rationale and calms down enough to understand how Bod is helping her. After the Indigo Man disappears, the Sleer, a mysterious

creature, makes its presence felt to both children but speaks only to Bod. When Bod says that this monster won't be able to hurt them, just scare them, the Sleer responds, "FEAR IS THE WEAPON OF THE SLEER" (Gaiman 56, emphasis original). Bod then tells Scarlett they should probably go, acknowledging the limits of his own power outside the graveyard proper, as well as Scarlett's fear tolerances. What happens in the tomb, and afterwards, forces Bod to acknowledge that his two worlds of the living and the dead are not always supposed to interact with each other.

As Scarlett moves with Bod through the liminal fantasy, her disappearance is noticed by her parents, and they call the police. When Scarlett is found, her parents start fighting over whose fault it was that she went missing and they declare that a cemetery is no place for a little girl to play. The next time Bod sees Scarlett in the graveyard she tells him that her family is moving away, but as she leaves she says, "You're brave. You are the bravest person I know, and you are my friend. I don't care if you *are* imaginary" (Gaiman 60, emphasis original). Even though Scarlett clearly has very real feelings in relation to Bod and the graveyard, she is unable to fully accept his fantasy world after all, or even that Bod himself is real. Whereas Scarlett's earlier acceptance of Bod's world normalized the world for both Bod and the readers, Scarlett's parting words here declare it all as imaginary and complicate the normalcy of the graveyard for Bod—but not for readers.

Readers have a metafictional experience at this point, where they can see that Scarlett is being as naïve as her father was when he said that the boy in the graveyard was just Scarlett's imaginary friend. Readers are aware that they *should* think like Scarlett, but we find it frustrating that Bod's world cannot be wholly normalized within the text. Mendlesohn writes, "Of the liminal fantasies, the form I recognize most easily as fantastical are the

fantasies of irony. In these, we are presented with the obviously fantastical, and watch while the protagonists ignore it or respond in ways that feel dissonant” (Mendlesohn 191). The truth of the matter is if Scarlett is going to continue a normal life outside of the graveyard, she cannot bring the fantastic out with her. She might have experienced this world first-hand, but is able to leave the fantastic precisely because it is liminal. Scarlett’s departure makes Bod aware that it is not normal for living humans to stay too long in graveyards, let alone live there; he is now well aware of how he is different, but also aware that the outside world is not yet safe for him.

In Chapter Three, “The Hounds of God,” Silas has to leave for a little while and Bod, like most six-year-olds, becomes mad when his guardian’s attention is drawn away from him. At such moments, when children find themselves powerless over the adults in their lives, children often fantasize about the power they do not have but wish they did. Gaiman provides this power fantasy for Bod and his readers as Bod embarks on his own adventure that challenges the limits of his heterotopian graveyard even more than his venture into the underground tomb. Foucault writes, “The heterotopia has the power of juxtaposing in a single real place different spaces and locations that are incompatible with each other” (354). As the graveyard is a real place (validated by living humans interacting with it), then it is the spaces Bod explores within the graveyard that submerge readers deeper into a fantasy, one which appears incompatible with the fantasy of the graveyard. We see such locations when Bod and Scarlett enter the tomb, and again as Bod travels through the “ghoul-gate.” The ghoul-gate appears to be an extension of the graveyard: “One grave in every graveyard belongs to the ghouls...waterstained and bulging, with cracked or broken stone, scraggly grass or rank weeds about it, and a feeling, when you reach it, of abandonment” (Gaiman 61).



We again see how the world of the graveyard is merging the fantastic with reality, and liminally existing in-between them. If one grave in every graveyard exists as this one, any reader can go find one and watch for ghouls herself.

Bod's power fantasy (enacted within his reality) begins as three ghouls enter Bod's graveyard and convince him that life with them would be much more fun and exciting; he believes them, especially because it appears that Silas has abandoned him at this moment. Bod feels helpless because there is nothing he could do to stop Silas from leaving, but here he has the chance to choose to leave himself. The ghouls toss Bod through the ghoul-gate, another seeming extension of his graveyard, and he is submerged in total darkness for the first time in recent memory: "Bod had not experienced total darkness for many years...Now he was in utter darkness, feeling himself being pitched forward in a sequence of jerks and rushes, the wind rushing past him. It was frightening, but it was also exhilarating" (Gaiman 78). Bod finds himself in a new aspect of the world of the dead, where he is exposed to a different kind of fantasy within but also moving away from his protective heterotopian graveyard. Botting writes that heterotopias "presented worlds and adventures that stretched the bounds of probability and fancy and...disturbed the balance of fiction and reality that maintained an ordered and natural society by opening up its, and its subject's, limits to the indeterminate and expansive freedoms of the imagination" (247). As Bod's reality is a liminal fantasy, he is submerged into a deeper level of fantasy when he desires to escape; the ghoul-gate becomes a passage into a different world accessed through his own. Whereas Bod has the power to choose to go through the ghoul-gate, he rapidly learns he doesn't hold much power in this new world that is definitely not his graveyard.

Bod's fun shifts into fear as the ghouls tell him what it means to be a ghoul and that he is expected to become one, or to be eaten by them. Either way, he knows he needs to get back home and he calls for help in the language that Ms. Lupescu (his werewolf nanny) taught him, because he is coming to realize what he most fears: not being able to return home. Coats writes on the anxiety that Gaiman's characters are exposed to within his works of fantasy:

What if I lose my home, which represents, for most children, the boundaries of their whole world? ... What is interesting about this particular anxiety is that it is not at all irrational; rather it will certainly come to pass. Children will lose the presently necessary comforts of their home, their family, and the protection from responsibility that those things afford them; there is a Gothic moment where that vague anxiety must be turned into suspense, and so they had better learn to cope with whatever symptom that trauma has produced.

("Between" 80)

In his entrance to Ghûlheim (the home of the ghouls) Bod realizes that he may never get back to his graveyard, where he *is* loved and protected. Gaiman writes *The Graveyard Book* episodically, making it clear that Bod continues to grow throughout the story and that one day he will be old enough to move away and live outside the graveyard. This episode, where he enters the world of the ghouls, signifies that he is not meant to live in the solely fantastic world because he is a living human. It is also known that one day Bod will leave the graveyard to live among other living humans, but Bod is also still a child, and he comes to realize that, for the time being, he still needs the safety of his protective graveyard home.

Bod's fantastic adventures into the tomb and through the ghoul-gate show him his fantastic limits within the graveyard and when Bod is eight years old, he has his first adventure outside of the graveyard and in the living world as he embarks into the village to obtain a headstone for his new friend, Liza Hempstock (a deceased witch). The graveyard is where Bod is safest, and it is this adventure into the human world that again forces Bod to acknowledge how the graveyard really works to protect him, and, perhaps more importantly, what kind of world it protects him from. Gaiman writes, "He was eight years old, and the world beyond the graveyard held no terrors for him...His heart pounding, Bod walked out into the world" (Gaiman 118). Again, we see irony both in how the town is perceived as scary while the graveyard is safe, and in what Bod is thinking compared to what he is experiencing; Bod might believe himself ready for the human world, but his heart reveals his nervousness. And he does wind up in terrible trouble. He enters a pawn shop, and we see him through the eyes of the owner, Abanazer Bolger: "He looked to be about seven years old, and dressed in his grandfather's clothes. He smelled like a shed. His hair was long and shaggy, and he seemed extremely grave" (Gaiman 121). This switch in perspective from Bod to Bolger forces the reader to recognize who is the more powerful of the two characters; outside of the graveyard Bod is in danger, partially because it is clear that he is an outsider and partially because he is a child. Bod shows Bolger the brooch that he took from the Sleer's treasure, good-heartedly trying to get money to buy Liza a headstone, and at the sight of it Bolger becomes much friendlier, "'This is old,' he said. 'It's'—priceless, he thought—'probably not worth much'...Bod's face fell" (Gaiman 123). In this manner the reader can recognize how Bolger is trying to take advantage of Bod. Bolger keeps pressuring him when Bod resists telling where he found the brooch: "Bod looked worried. Then he said, 'I found it

in an old grave. But I can't say where.' He stopped, because naked greed and excitement had replaced the friendliness on Abanazer Bolger's face" (Gaiman 123). This scene works to include the reader in knowing how much danger Bod is in, even though Bod doesn't fully realize it yet, and how powerless Bod really is outside of the graveyard. Just mentioning a grave could lead this stranger to the graveyard, and could potentially compromise Bod's safe heterotopia.

As Bod is trapped in the back room of the shop by Bolger, he is forced to realize what the reader has already grasped: that he is not ready for the world outside the graveyard yet. Botting explains, "Space is more than geographical or physical; it is also psychological. The subject, like social space, is a topological being, an effect of positions, of sets of relations that are both external and interiorized. The relation to other spaces marks both the intersection and divergence of subject and society" (244). Outside of his graveyard home, Bod cannot be the same person; he is forced to accept the rules of reality in the center of human society, where humans are too often evil and manipulative. After Abanazer locks Bod in the back room of his shop, we see him holding the man Jack's business card. Even without being privy to this sight that Gaiman provides for the readers, Bod realizes the danger he is in and begins to panic, "He pulled on the door, but it held fast. He felt stupid for having been lured inside, foolish for not trusting his first impulses, to get as far away from the sour-faced man as possible. He had broken all the rules of the graveyard, and everything had gone wrong. What would Silas say? Or the Owenses?" (Gaiman 125). Curiously, it is when he recognizes the protection of the graveyard, and what terrible things can happen when he breaks its rules, that Liza appears in the room, presenting a piece of the graveyard to rescue him. We can accept her sudden appearance because the graveyard is now as much a part of Bod as he is of

it. Liza appears as a liminal figure like Bod, as she isn't actually buried in the official bounds of the graveyard since she was accused of being a witch. She is able to help Bod master "Fading," one of his Freedoms of the Graveyard, so he can escape the room by disappearing from human sight long enough to get to safety.

Through several experiences in and beyond the graveyard, Bod becomes aware of his safe home that protects him from the outside human horrors, as well as from more fantastical horrors. Both of Bod's adventures into the other, more fantastic spaces within his graveyard help him realize who he is in relation to his graveyard. He is able to exhibit power within the tomb, knowing that he can control the situation to make the Indigo Man disappear and then remove Scarlett from the scene before it becomes too much for either of them. His entrance into Ghûlheim, on the other hand, helps him to realize his own fantasy limits and that being a living human means he can only handle so much fantasy. After these two excursions Bod realizes where he can exist comfortably within the limits of his graveyard; both adventures play large parts in constructing his identity as Nobody and helping him to realize that he will one day have to leave the graveyard to live in the outside human society. Meanwhile, his adventure to Bolger's pawn shop forces him to realize that he is not yet ready to merge with the living society either, because when he does, he will have to leave the graveyard behind.

Bod's marginal position is one of both power and powerlessness because he is able to cross borders and move between worlds. Foucault writes, "We do not live in a sort of vacuum, within which individuals and things can be located, or that may take on so many different fleeting colours, but in a set of relationships that define positions which cannot be equated or in any way superimposed" (351). Bod's relationships to the graveyard and its inhabitants are evolving and complex. During these first eight years of his life, he becomes

aware of the safety he has here, and the graveyard ultimately has great influence on Bod's personal identity. By being the only figure growing and aging within the graveyard, Bod is constantly aware of his living status, as is the reader. It is a wonderful reminder of how precious and fantastic *life* is. In his existence within the liminal fantasy of the graveyard, Bod becomes an other – othered from both the outside society as well as from the society of the graveyard. He is able to exist as this othered figure because the graveyard protects him – it is *his* heterotopia.

## Chapter II—Nobody is a Monster

“Do monsters really exist? Surely they must, for if they did not, how could we?”

—Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “Monster Culture”

As I discuss in my first chapter, Bod gains protection through the heterotopian graveyard as he forms relationships with its inhabitants. These relationships have an even greater effect on Bod’s identity development, as they are not your average caretakers and guardians. Through entering the liminal world of the graveyard, readers experience a shift in what is expected and an obscuring of definitions and distinctions between what is human and what is monstrous. Readers are first exposed to the man Jack—a human-figure with monstrous qualities—and then we meet the mythological creatures that come to take care of Bod, figures that are traditionally thought of as monsters themselves. Mythological monsters are commonly found in adolescent literature, usually as representations of the real horrors (terrible humans) of which real adolescents must be cautious. Gaiman subverts this metaphor by actually having humans be the villains in *The Graveyard Book*, and traditional monsters be the caregivers to Bod. We see this specifically with his ghostly parents, with his nanny (Miss Lupescu), and, most importantly, with his guardian, Silas. It is the influence of these mythological creatures that affects Bod’s identity, so that he appears as a somewhat mythologically monstrous human. As Gaiman blurs the lines of what exactly is monstrous with the characters Silas, Miss Lupescu, and even Bod himself, it becomes clear that being monstrous comes with being human, and vice versa.

Monsters have been engaging human interest for centuries; they have been lurking in

shadows, hiding under beds, and invading our nightmares. Within *The Graveyard Book* there exists a shift in what we define as and how we regard “monsters” that has created a seeming revelation of what we so often forget in our frightened states of mind: humans created monsters. In Gaiman’s liminal text, we can see the parallels between the monster and the human, especially within the adolescent. But what is a monster? According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), a monster is defined in a large variety of ways; one of which states, “Originally: a mythical creature which is part animal and part human, or combines elements of two or more animal forms, and is frequently of great size and ferocious appearance. Later, more generally: any imaginary creature that is large, ugly, and frightening” (“monster”). The idea that monsters are beings that are human-like, while at the same time part-something else, is noteworthy due to how, historically, humans created the idea of monsters and often chose to reveal monsters as beings somewhat like themselves. In the article, “Monster Culture,” Jeffrey Jerome Cohen writes, “Monsters are never created *ex nihilo*, but through a process of fragmentation and recombination in which elements are extracted ‘from various forms’ (including—indeed, especially—marginalized social groups) and then assembled as the monster, ‘which can then claim an independent identity’” (11). In other words, the creators of these creatures formed them from what they found frightening to themselves or threatening to their ideals. Whether monsters served to simply frighten others or to ostracize certain social groups, humans created monster stories for particular reasons. From these purposes of creation, monsters continue to evolve and change, being redefined with each new story they feature in, to become significant characters with new, sometimes even conflicting identities.

Within adolescent literature monsters are often used as metaphors for the very real



horrors the world holds, to teach children to recognize evil. As Joni Richards Bodart writes in *They Suck, They Bite, They Eat, They Kill*, “To know what danger is, one must experience it, and doing so in a book about monsters can be both safer and more educational than living it... Today’s children and teens need to know who the monsters are, why they are dangerous, and how to overcome them” (xxii). While using mythological monsters within fiction is effective at teaching children and teens about evil, Gaiman flips this idea and uses such creatures to provide safety for his protagonist as they protect him from the real, human danger outside the graveyard. As I discuss in my first chapter, the graveyard becomes a protective home for Bod, and the figures surrounding him become his family. He learns that it is the humans outside that cannot be trusted, such as Abanazer Bolger in the pawn shop or the man Jack who tried to murder him. Gaiman credits his readers by representing the world his readers are familiar with: one in which no mythological monster can hurt you, but real humans can.

Gaiman’s creatures within *The Graveyard Book* both follow and subvert traditional definitions; they first appear strange and fantastic to the reader, but then become seemingly natural protectors and family for Bod. When Bod is six years old, Silas has to take a trip and he leaves a new nanny, Miss Lupescu, in his stead to care for Bod. In her first introduction Miss Lupescu appears to be wholly human and very stern:

She sniffed. Then she looked at Silas and said, “So. This is the boy.” She got up from her seat and walked all around Bod...she said, “You will report to me on waking, and before you go to sleep. I have rented a room in a house over there.” She pointed to a roof just visible from where they stood. “However, I

shall spend my time in this graveyard. I am here as a historian, researching the history of old graves. You understand, boy? *Da?*” (Gaiman 66)

The fact that Miss Lupescu is not staying in the graveyard is significant; it marks her as different from the figures Bod is familiar with, and, as far as Bod can tell, this marks Miss Lupescu as human because she can successfully merge with the outside human society (unlike Silas who sleeps in the graveyard). With all of Bod’s experiences thus far there is nothing special or interesting about adult humans—they are actually most often threatening figures from Bod’s perspective; Bod is more comfortable with the creatures he has been surrounded by in the graveyard. Miss Lupescu brings Bod unfamiliar food and teaches him new lessons, such as the different kinds of people that exist: ““There are the living and the dead, there are day-folk and night-folk, there are ghouls and mist-walkers, there are high hunters and the Hounds of God. Also, there are solitary types.’ ‘What are you?’ asked Bod. ‘I,’ she said sternly, ‘am Miss Lupescu’” (Gaiman 71). While the reader and Bod eventually find out that Miss Lupescu is a Hound of God (a werewolf), at this point she is ambiguous, appearing mean, boring, and human—appearing as what Bod believes to be the enemy.

It is when Bod has his adventure through the ghoulish gate that he discovers that Miss Lupescu is really a Hound of God, and, after this discovery, he can fully come to appreciate and enjoy spending time with her. In her werewolf form Miss Lupescu rescues Bod from the ghouls, and as Christine Robertson analyzes in her article, “‘I want to be like you’: Riffs on Kipling in Neil Gaiman’s *The Graveyard Book*,”

When Bod first sees Miss Lupescu in her animal form, he describes her as ‘a huge grey animal, like a dog but far larger...an animal with flaming eyes and white fangs and huge paws’...Caught between the ghouls and the hound, Bod

is understandably bewildered: his first thought is that *'I'm between the ghouls and the monster'* (91, emphasis in the original), and I think the reader is meant to share in this sense of panic, not knowing which side is good and which evil. (170)

While I agree that Bod and the readers are bewildered in this moment, it has already been made clear that the ghouls (who appear as a cross between human-like and monstrous) are going to harm Bod if he stays with them (either by turning him into a ghoul or by eating him), but this giant hound coming at him is some new monstrous creature, and we have already been conditioned to trust monsters at this point in the text. Monsters are normal; they are the ones who have saved and protected Bod up until this point. Therefore, Bod chooses to hope for the best and go with the "grey beast" (Gaiman 92), who is then revealed as Miss Lupescu.

Traditional werewolves are shape shifting creatures, and for the most part they appear human. But they are split between two worlds, being only part human and part animal. Werewolves are also usually regarded as demon-like figures, but in *The Graveyard Book* "'Hound of God' replaces the term 'werewolf'; Miss Lupescu sees herself not as a denizen of Hell but rather as an agent working in the name of God" (Robertson 170). Ultimately, Miss Lupescu is represented as another heroic figure for Bod, as she chooses to define herself as a "Hound of God" instead of allowing the human society to define her as a "werewolf." Gaiman writes that the Hounds of God "*claim their transformation is a gift from their creator, and they repay the gift with their tenacity, for they will pursue an evildoer to the very gates of Hell*" (97, original emphasis). Miss Lupescu is an example of a monster that

chooses her own identity (and label), challenging the way readers perceive such monstrous figures, and when saving Bod, she certainly traveled into a Hellish place to do so.

Miss Lupescu also becomes another liminal character that Bod can relate to, and she is a crucial example for Bod as we witness her successfully living in the outside human society despite her othered, monstrous status. Bod's liminal status represents the liminality associated with adolescents who are between childhood and adulthood, learning to navigate their own ways between these states. Bodart discusses the duality that adolescents share with monsters:

Those who are alive, yet dead; those who are animal, yet human; those who can move from the world of fantasy to the world of reality. Meeting these monsters and recognizing their similar situation allows adolescents to identify with them, and perhaps learn how to be comfortable on the borderlines until they are ready to step forward into the adult world. (xxvii)

Because Bod knows a liminal figure who successfully navigates between the worlds in which they both live, he becomes prepared to do the same as he moves into his adolescent years. Bod also knows one day he must leave the graveyard to join the human society outside, where he will have to navigate and adjust again, and seeing Miss Lupescu succeed at this makes him know that he will be able to do so as well.

Gaiman takes great care in labeling the kinds of monsters he is writing about in the text, if he chooses to name them at all. He often casually inserts bits of general knowledge and characteristics that mark such beings (at least to readers who are familiar with common monster lore) to allude to the kind of creature he is portraying. We see this practice with Miss Lupescu (not a "werewolf," but a "Hound of God") and even with the man Jack, whose name

labels him as a normal human, but whose actions portray him as a monster. Another figure recognized as a monster throughout history that also appears in the book is the vampire: a creature that began as a sexual, blood-sucking, flesh-eating monster, but now has become a popular, lovable guardian within Gaiman's character, Silas. Gaiman neglects to even use the term "vampire" in the text, but there is enough evidence in the text that we can infer that Silas is one. We see Silas interacting with both the living and the dead from his first appearance, and throughout the text we see that he sleeps during the day, has nightly excursions where he leaves the graveyard, and does not eat the same food as Bod. At one point he also tells Bod, "I...am precisely what I am, and nothing more. I am, as you say, not alive. But if I am ended, I shall simply cease to be. My kind *are*, or we are *not*" (Gaiman 179, emphasis original). Cohen discusses an evolution of vampires, from Bram Stoker's vision to a more modern image presented by Anne Rice. He writes, "Even if vampiric figures are found almost worldwide, from ancient Egypt to modern Hollywood, each reappearance and its analysis is still bound in a double act of construction and reconstitution" (Cohen 5). Within each representation of the vampire, a little more information about humanity is revealed, and as Gaiman reconstructs the monstrous vampire, presenting the creature as a protective figure, we get a crucial multi-dimensional being that embodies similar characteristics and feelings to those of a young adult, as the above Bodart quote displays. Silas is the representation of what we want, and need, adults to be: role models and protectors of helpless children. Meanwhile, the man Jack represents the great societal fear of what adults are actually capable of, which I elaborate more on in my next chapter.

Even Silas's introduction complicates ideas about differentiating humans and monsters. In Bod's entrance to the graveyard we meet Silas as a mysterious figure, first

introduced as “the stranger,” as he escorts the man Jack out of the graveyard to prevent him from killing Bod when he is still a toddler. Silas’s description is eerie, as a comparison between him and the murderous man Jack reveals:

The man Jack was tall. This man was taller. The man Jack wore dark clothes. This man’s clothes were darker. People who noticed the man Jack when he was about his business—and he did not like to be noticed—were troubled, or made uncomfortable, or found themselves unaccountably scared. The man Jack looked up at the stranger, and it was the man Jack who was troubled (Gaiman 18).

Here Gaiman elaborates on how frightening the man Jack really is, and readers must ponder: who is this mysterious figure in the graveyard that frightens the murderous monster we have already met? On the other hand, this “stranger” is intimidating the man Jack in order to protect Bod, a toddler Silas hasn’t even met yet. From the very beginning, Gaiman distorts traditional distinctions of guardian and monster in Silas, even as he blurs the distinction between human and monster in the man Jack.

We also see the societal fear of adults abusing their power over children represented in two policemen when Bod is eleven; the officers allow a young girl, Mo Quilling, who is fighting with Bod at school, to influence their decision to pick Bod up off the street. The policemen are quickly revealed to be abusing their power as we see Mo sitting in the back seat when they make Bod get in. When they ask Bod where he lives, Bod tells them, “‘You can’t arrest me for not telling you my name or address.’ ‘No,’ said the policeman. ‘I can’t. But I can take you down to the station until you give us the name of a parent, guardian, responsible adult, into whose care we can release you’” (Gaiman 199). We also see the

policemen intimidating Bod as Bod asks, ““Do they have prisons for kids?”” and one of the officers answers, ““Getting worried, now, are you? ... I don’t blame you. You kids. Running wild. Some of you need locking up, I’ll tell you”” (201). Clearly, these officers are not afraid to express their power over ordinary citizens, especially over a young boy who was just walking down the street, when they are supposed to be authority figures kids can go to for protection. We see this corruption on a societal and individual level as one of the cops is Mo’s uncle. Therefore, Mo believes herself able to abuse power over others as well (which she does by bullying others in school), but it is particularly alarming that adults in authority are just as willing to bully Bod.

When Bod ends up in this terrible situation, which is similar to how he was locked in the pawn shop (an incident discussed in Chapter One), it is his graveyard home that protects him—this time in the form of Silas. Bod notices, “Something huge was flying through the air, above the car and to one side, something darker and bigger than the biggest bird. Something man-size that flickered and fluttered as it moved, like the strobing flight of a bat” (Gaiman 201). Again, we get another allusion to vampiric abilities in Silas as he flies into the scene like a bat. Whereas this entrance would usually signify a frightening situation, Gaiman uses it to prelude Bod’s rescue. As the policemen continue intimidating Bod “there was a *thump!* Something big rode up onto the hood of the car and was knocked off into the dark,” which causes the policemen to panic (202). As the policemen go to the body to investigate what exactly they hit,

Bod looked at the face of the fallen body—then he began to bang on the window, frantically, desperately. The large policeman came over to the car. ‘What?’ he said, irritably. “You hit my—my dad,” said Bod. ... Silas was

sprawled on his back, on the ground, where the car had knocked him. He was deathly still. Bod's eyes prickled. He said, "Dad?" Then he said, "You killed him." He wasn't lying, he told himself—not really. (203)

Bod's reference to lying can refer not only to the fact that killing Silas is complicated, but also to his first comment about Silas being his dad. Silas is Bod's guardian, and could be seen as a father-figure, especially as he throws himself in front of a cop car to save Bod. Silas is the most significant figure in Bod's identity development, and his mere presence gives Bod courage. As the officers start fighting over what happened and who's to blame, Bod speaks up: "'What I saw,' said Bod, 'is that you agreed to do a favor for your niece, and frighten a kid she's been fighting with at school. So you arrested me without a warrant for being out late, and then when my dad runs out into the road to try and stop you or to find out what was going on, you intentionally ran him over'" (Gaiman 203). With Silas here to rescue and protect Bod, Bod stands up to the corrupt officials and distracts them, so that Silas can grab Bod and fly back to the graveyard. It is also when there is this adult presence, albeit a seemingly unconscious one, that the policemen are forced to acknowledge what they've done and the potential consequences of their actions.

Again, Gaiman presents humans as evildoers and the mythological monsters as saviors. After the event, Bod and Silas talk about it: "'Does it still hurt?' asked the boy. 'A little,' said his guardian. 'But I heal fast. I'll soon be as good as ever.'" Bod asks, "'Could it have killed you? Stepping out in front of that car?'" His guardian shook his head. "There are ways to kill people like me," he said. "But they don't involve cars. I am very old and very tough'" (Gaiman 209). While Gaiman never declares it outright, it is clear that Silas is a vampire: he is able to fly, is incredibly strong, and cannot be killed as easily as the average



human. By not using the term “vampire” Gaiman avoids any preconceptions readers would bring to the text, and we see Silas develop first as a protective father-figure and later as a mythological monster-like creature, but never as evil, challenging our thoughts on humans, monsters, and the nature of evil.

Bod himself recognizes how important Silas is to him earlier in the text, when he is only six, thinking about how Silas provides food, but this was “the least of the things that Silas did for him. He gave advice, cool, sensible, and unfailingly correct; he knew more than the graveyard folk did, for his nightly excursions into the world outside meant that he was able to describe a world that was current, not hundreds of years out of date...most of all, he made Bod feel safe” (Gaiman 68). Silas is the father-figure whom Bod looks to for safety, as most children his age would. Silas also links the two worlds that Bod belongs to, as no other member in the graveyard can. Later in the story, when Bod is older, Silas reveals that he has not always been the protective figure he is now, referring to the traditional historic vampire lore: “Silas took a step closer to Bod, which made the youth tilt back his head to look up at the tall man’s pale face. Silas said, ‘I have not always done the right thing. When I was younger ... I did worse things than Jack. Worse than any of them. I was the monster, then, Bod, and worse than any monster’” (Gaiman 303). Silas is very honest with Bod in order to show him that people can change, and that anyone can be considered a monster in some way. He also represents the evolving history of the vampire, from a fear-invoking creature to one that protects and helps raise a living boy. Having characters such as “Silas in Gaiman’s novel force us to challenge our ideas of monstrosity because, despite the acts of evil for which they are responsible, they have also enabled the hero Bod’s survival by becoming his caretakers

and protectors” (Robertson 172). Gaiman presents a monster with a monstrous past as a protector, while at the same time presenting a human as the ultimate terror with the man Jack.

Silas is a liminal being who comes to the aid of and is a role-model to our liminal protagonist, a kind of mirror that aids in Bod’s development as both of them live in this liminal space between the living and the dead. Silas displays how one can successfully cross the boundaries between these worlds, as he is constantly going back and forth, despite being considered an outsider within both of them. When Bod discovers that Silas is a member of the “Honour Guard,” and questions Silas on what this guard does, Silas replies, “Mostly, we guard the borderlands. We protect the borders of things” (Gaiman 303). Again, Gaiman challenges our preconceptions of monsters, transforming the vampiric tradition of *haunting* borders into Silas *protecting* those borders instead. Significantly, Silas is protecting the borders for Bod, who is an adolescent and, therefore, just as liminal and as much of an outsider as Silas. Bodart writes, “To adolescents who are also marginalized figures, outsiders struggling to become insiders or to become comfortable with their outsider status, the vampire’s self-acceptance is something to aspire to” (15). As Bod watches Silas successfully move between worlds, Bod can identify with him and know that he will be ready to move into that outside world one day as well. Both vampires and adolescents live in this in-between state, lurking on those borders that surround them. By using a vampire as a guardian for Bod, Gaiman displays the parallel between the two beings and how their liminal states make them outsiders in regards to each of the worlds they are linked to.

Gaiman continues complicating ideas of monstrosity by presenting different monstrous characteristics in Bod: as Bod is surrounded and influenced by monstrous figures, he takes on some of those qualities in his own identity development. When Bod is about

twelve years old, he attends school for the first time, and as he ventures outside of the graveyard he keeps what he has learned, such as the ability to “Fade” and “Haunt,” with him. He also embodies significant qualities that the reader has viewed in Silas, like using his mythical powers to protect someone who lacks the ability to protect himself. A significant moment when we notice this protective impulse in Bod is when he stands up to two bullies, Nick and Mo, on behalf of the seventh graders they blackmail. The bullies decide to follow Bod to teach him a lesson and Bod leads them to a graveyard, a different graveyard than his home. He then Fades from sight and uses “Fear” on Nick and Mo, causing them to run away frightened. His efforts are complimented by one of the members of this graveyard: “Bod watched them run with satisfaction. ‘That was good, dear...A nice Fade, first. Then the Fear.’ ‘Thank you,’ said Bod. ‘I hadn’t even tried the Fear out on living people. I mean, I knew the theory’” (Gaiman 189). Bod speaks of these abilities casually, as if they are normal for the average living person to have—which they appear to be for him. But the reality is that he just became a frightening figure to his human peers by exhibiting monstrous abilities to control their moods. He even plans how he could further these abilities, asking his ghostly teacher (Mr. Pennyworth), “I think I’ve got Fear down, but how do I take it up all the way to Terror?” (Gaiman 191). And Bod succeeds at this too, through visiting Nick’s pirate dream as a Pirate King. Readers witness the event from Nick’s scared perspective:

“Do you think you’re a pirate, Nick?” asked his captor, and suddenly something about him seemed familiar to Nick.

“You’re that kid,” he said. “Bob Owens.”

“I,” said his captor, “am Nobody. And you need to change. Turn over a new leaf. Reform. All that. Or things will get very bad for you.”

“Bad how?”

“Bad in your head.” Said the Pirate King, who was now only the boy from his class and they were in the school hall, not the deck of the pirate ship, although the storm had not abated and the floor of the hall pitched and rolled like a ship at sea.

“This is a dream,” Nick said.

“Of course it’s a dream,” said the other boy. “*I would have to be some kind of monster to do this in real life.*” [my emphasis]

“What can you do to me in a dream?” asked Nick. He smiled. “I’m not afraid of you.” ... “I was hoping it wouldn’t have to be like this,” said the other boy. He tipped his head on one side as if he was listening to something. “They’re hungry,” he said.

“What are?” asked Nick.

“The things in the cellar. Or belowdecks. Depends whether this is a school or a ship, doesn’t it?”

Nick felt himself beginning to panic. “It isn’t . . . spiders . . . is it?” he said.

“It might be,” said the other boy. “You’ll find out, won’t you?”

Nick shook his head.

“No,” he said. “*Please* no.”

“Well,” said the other boy. “It’s all up to you, isn’t it? Change your ways or visit the cellar.”

The noise got louder—a scuttling sort of a scuffling noise, and while Nick Farthing had no idea what it was, he was utterly, completely certain that whatever it would turn out to be would be the most scary terrible thing he ever—would ever—encounter . . .

He woke up screaming. (Gaiman194)

There are several instances in this scene where Gaiman complicates how we view Bod, as well as the notion of good versus evil. As Bod said, he would have to be “some kind of monster to do this in real life,” but the terror he is invoking is very real to Nick, especially considering the blurring of fantasy and reality already at play in the novel. We know Bod is terrorizing Nick for a good cause, but the way he threatens Nick, with what we can assume is Nick’s worst fear, is frightening even to readers—and seemingly evil, or at least wrong.

While Bod succeeds in making Nick and Mo stop bullying other kids he becomes a fearful figure himself, challenging any ideas of people being all good or all bad, or even the idea that good people don’t sometimes do bad things. Bod is merely using the techniques he has learned, but in doing so he has become a bully to the bullies by embodying monstrous qualities. Bod accepts his otherworldly abilities as normal, but others sense these qualities and label him as strange and other, even as monstrous. Bod’s personal identity becomes a combination of the living human and the mythological, because he cannot identify solely with the inhabitants of the graveyard since he is still linked to the outside human world through his mortality.

In the later scenes where Bod is protecting himself and his friend Scarlett from the evil Jacks of All Trades, he uses trickery to harm and rid the graveyard of these men. Bod tricks the man Jack into becoming the master of the monstrous Sleer, the ghostly creature I

discussed in my previous chapter. When Bod prods the Sleer about what it will do with its new master, it responds, “WE WILL PROTECT HIM UNTIL THE END OF TIME. THE SLEER WILL HOLD HIM IN ITS COILS FOREVER AND NEVER LET HIM ENDURE THE DANGERS OF THE WORLD” (Gaiman 284). The Sleer then engulfs the man Jack. It is at this point, when Bod conquers the man Jack, that Scarlett reveals somewhat of a truth about our young protagonist: “Scarlett took a step away from him. She said, ‘You aren’t a person. People don’t behave like you. You’re as bad as he was. You’re a monster’” (Gaiman 286). This recognition of Bod as a monster comes from an outside perspective, from a person who does not know the complete history of what happened or everything that Bod went through in order to get rid of the male attackers. Nevertheless, he appears as a monster—a traditionally evil monster—to Scarlett because of what he is capable of.

While Bod’s intentions were good, he still frightened Scarlett. In the article, “Rare and Unfamiliar Things: Vladimir Nabokov’s ‘Monsters,’” Kellie Dawson writes that these othered humans “are afflicted with conditions that make them seem monstrous to their fellow humans. This supposed monstrosity separates them from humanity, causing them great suffering” (116). Through the destruction of the Jacks, Bod loses Scarlett; Silas comes in and makes her forget she ever met Bod. Scarlett is the only living human that Bod formed a friendship with, and he clutches for acceptance and validation of his world from this girl outside of it: “Look, it’s over. I know it was hard. But. We did it. You and me. We beat them” (Gaiman 287). Scarlett’s reaction is the exact opposite of what Bod wanted, “Her head was shaking gently, as if she was denying everything she saw, everything she was experiencing. She looked up at Silas, and said only, ‘I want to go home. Please?’” (287). Again, we see Bod being viewed as a monster from a “normal” human perspective, and Bod is unable to understand why. Later, Bod has a conversation with his guardian and Silas tells

him, ““People want to forget the impossible. It makes their world safer.”” (Gaiman 289).

Whether the “impossible” is some boy having mythical powers, or the idea of adults abusing their power over children, these monstrous beings are things most people would rather not think about because when we are forced to think about such impossible (or perhaps very possible) things, as Scarlett was, the notions of good and evil are more complicated than we would like them to be.

Scarlett’s reaction also forces Bod to think about his own identity. He tells Silas, ““She was scared of me... But why? I saved her life. I’m not a bad person. And I’m just like her. I’m alive too” (Gaiman 289). Bod is able to see how he and Scarlett are alike, whereas Scarlett comes to see Bod as a monstrous outsider; these different perceptions coincide with how many adolescents view themselves and others in developing their respective identities. In her article, “Joseph Bruchac’s ‘Dark’ Novels: Confronting the Terror of Adolescence,” Michelle Stewart writes, “Adolescence signifies the uncanny in the way that both are different yet strangely the same since they revolve around issues of power and identity/subjectivity” (85). We see this uncanny relevance to power and identity throughout the entire story in Bod’s character. He is a human, being taught by ghosts, a werewolf, and a vampire to do such things as “Haunt” and “Fade,” which changes what readers think of as monstrous into something normal within the represented society, but still mark him negatively as monstrous to other humans like Nick, Mo, and Scarlett within the story. Adolescence is a time of uncertainty, where peers will often not understand each other. It is fitting that Gaiman ends this chapter with Bod’s unanswered question: ““That girl,’ said Bod. ‘Scarlett. Why was she so scared of me, Silas?’” (Gaiman 291). And Silas, like many guardians of adolescents, is unable to satisfyingly answer such a question.

Gaiman reconstructs the definition of a monster; he distorts the separation of good and evil, showing that it is possible for one being to embody both. It is significant that he chooses liminal monsters like werewolves and vampires as protectors of the hero—a truly liminal hero who embodies some monstrous qualities as well. Silas, historically one of the most terrifying monster-figures, becomes the most important protective figure for Bod's development, posing as a father figure and preparing Bod to eventually enter the world of the living. Cohen writes:

Monsters are our children. They can be pushed to the farthest margins of geography and discourse, hidden away at the edges of the world and in the forbidden recesses of our mind, but they always return. And when they come back, they bring not just a fuller knowledge of our place in history and the history of knowing our place, but they bear self-knowledge, *human* knowledge—and a discourse all the more sacred as it arises from the Outside. These monsters ask us how we perceive the world, and how we have misrepresented what we have attempted to place...They ask us why we have created them (20).

I feel this quote very accurately represents what Gaiman achieves with his text. He presents monsters as a product of humanity, one whose definition has shifted to pertain to today's society—a society full of monstrous humans who must learn to navigate the worlds of good and evil. *The Graveyard Book* demonstrates, through its protagonist, that humans are not perfect; no person is either all good or all bad. Whereas monsters are usually used as metaphors for the real evils in the world, Gaiman uses monsters to help our protagonist



defeat the real monsters of the world—murderers, scam artists, and bullies. Vampires won't hurt you. Werewolves won't hurt you. But humans will try.

### Chapter III – The Jacks of All Trades: Nobody Gets Around the System

“Someone killed my mother and my father and my sister.”

“Yes. Someone did.”

“A man?”

“A man.”

“Which means,” said Bod, “you’re asking the wrong question.”

Silas raised an eyebrow. “How so?”

“Well,” said Bod. “If I go outside in the world, the question isn’t ‘who will keep me safe from him?’”

“No?”

“No. It’s ‘who will keep him safe from me?’” (Gaiman 180)

Neil Gaiman’s *The Graveyard Book* is a narrative driven by a self-fulfilling prophecy, which states that a particular child (Bod) will bring an end to the human organization, “The Jacks of All Trades” (the Jacks). As traditional self-fulfilling prophecies go, the Jacks become aware of the prophecy and then try to prevent it by attempting to murder Bod. It is through this attempted prevention that our protagonist eventually comes to destroy the organization. While self-fulfilling prophecies are fascinating in and of themselves, the Jacks seem to play a much larger role throughout the text besides this production of a story line. There is a clear power dynamic created by them in relation to the rest of society, as well as one created between the organization and Bod, which marks Bod as different. The Jacks are everything our protagonist is not: gendered, structured, controlling, and evil. Gaiman

presents them as the real monsters invading the fantastic world of the graveyard – the horror that threatens the protagonist, as shown in my previous chapter. Following his tradition of switching norms, Gaiman presents Bod as a queer character who subverts the typical norms of belonging. Whereas many adolescent texts display the struggle of finding oneself and “fitting in,” Gaiman presents Bod as a character who is able to develop an individual identity while having no desire to fit in anywhere—Bod and Silas actually fight for Bod to not become part of any larger, “normal” human society. It is by comparison against the Jacks that Bod embodies not only an othered status, but a queer one as well, and it is precisely this queer identity that gives him power over the oppressive society of the Jacks. He is the complete opposite of what the Jacks are, though he originally had the potential to be the same as them. Though the novel first introduces the man Jack, he leads us to Bod, who we then follow and root for in the development of the story and his own individual identity. This transition from Jack to Bod in the opening of the story creates a connection between the two characters, one that is the basis for Bod’s individual identity development through queerness.

As I have stated, the novel starts from the perspective of the man Jack while he is murdering Bod’s family; this event clearly labels the man Jack as a villain, a monster, who the reader and protagonist should be frightened of. In *They Suck, They Bite, They Eat, They Kill*, Joni Richards Bodart discusses, “In the last ten to fifteen years, the world has become a very dangerous place, with little that can be depended on. We have begun to realize not only that real monsters exist but that their actions can change our lives forever” (xxi). These real monsters refer to terrible humans who hurt others and, as I discuss in Chapter Two, many works of adolescent literature use mythological monsters to represent these real-life monsters. Bodart continues, “Children today are brought up in a ‘culture of fear,’ taught that

there are dangerous people out there who are capable of harming them, kidnapping them, or killing them and that they should trust no one. By the time they become teenagers, the chances are very good that they've either experienced something truly evil or know someone else who has" (xxii). Gaiman mirrors reality in his text by making an actual man, who is fully part of the outside human society, the villainous monster in the story who changes Bod's life forever. Through this choice, Gaiman places more faith in his readership to know that vampires, werewolves, and ghosts cannot, and will not, hurt you, but that other human beings can. After being pushed to the margins of society by the Jacks, Bod is first raised to fear the man Jack, but then comes to perceive himself as the Jacks' enemy—as seen in the quote with which I opened this chapter.

The man Jack is the first introduction to the idea of monsters within the story, and it is in the entrance into the world of the graveyard that we begin to see binaries form between different kinds of monsters. This also follows what I discussed in my last chapter about Gaiman inverting the ideas of humans and monsters—clearly the murderous man Jack is the real monster who both Bod and readers must be afraid of. A man, for the purpose of his own survival, is the monster hunting our protagonist. In *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Lee Edelman writes of such connections between evil men and younger boy counterparts – such as Captain Hook and Peter Pan or Lord Voldemort and Harry Potter. Such relationship constructions create resistance on the side of the child, which causes the adult to exert force against the child, even attempting to kill that child. In *The Graveyard Book*, Bod becomes the threatening queer figure that challenges the sameness of the Jacks:

The very value for which queerness regularly finds itself condemned: an insistence on sameness that intends to restore an Imaginary past. The Child,

that is, marks the fetishistic fixation of heteronormativity: an erotically charged investment in the rigid sameness of identity that is central to the compulsory narrative of reproductive futurism” (Edelman 21).

Usually, this argument is made to protect the Child, but as Bod is the threat to the Jacks’ society, he becomes the enemy they need to remove. The man Jack is trying to procure his societal futurism, which Bod has been prophesied to challenge. As Bod grows, we see how he is different – the otherness I have discussed in previous chapters – and Bod is the very definition of an individual, separate from any societal standards seen in the Jacks.

There are many norms that are created within society, and in traditional western society patriarchy is a large one, which the Jacks appear to emulate as well. In “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” Louis Althusser provides a theory of how society works as a cycle that will forever be repeated: the purpose of the individual is simply to become a part of a social order and further it by producing more “individuals.” Traditional gender roles and the idea of remaining within your place appear to be parts of a system that will remain productive; while this mentality may be beneficial to furthering society and ensuring the survival and continuance of humanity, such a process actually abolishes the idea of individualism in order to promote a more mechanical idea of society. This form of social structure is usually controlled by a specific group—the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA), or ruling class. Althusser writes, “The (Repressive) State Apparatus functions massively and predominantly *by repression* (including physical repression), while functioning secondarily by ideology” (“Ideology” 97, original emphasis). This group controlling the large societal norms and power within *The Graveyard Book* is the Jacks, who do not allow for, and therefore oppress, any form of individuality. We see them functioning by using physical

repression right from the beginning of the novel when the man Jack is attempting to murder Bod. About half way through the novel, we get a short section specifically on the Jacks; a meeting where the organization is celebrating their “Good Deeds Done,” and we see how the “Jacks of All Trades” organization is valued by society because they make things happen: “Children from poor places had been taken on exotic holidays. A bus had been bought to take people who needed it on excursions” (Gaiman 168). As we know the Jacks are really evil, these deeds clearly seem to be actual (and ideological) distractions to keep the fraternal organization in power.

Althusser describes how there is always one RSA that controls the rest of society, which establishes many Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) that reinforce the overall ruling ideology. The Jacks clearly have such an influence in schools, hospitals, and government, as we see with their “Good Deeds,” but they also seem to have hands in many other places as well: “There had been Jacks in governments and in police forces and in other places besides” (Gaiman 262). With their various donations, presences within, and overall influence over society, the Jacks are clearly the RSA influencing others, through both force and manipulation, to accept their ideology. They embody the ruling class, and as Althusser writes,

It is here that the role of the ruling ideology is heavily concentrated, the ideology of the ruling class which holds State power. It is the intermediation of the ruling ideology that ensures a (sometimes teeth-gritting) ‘harmony’ between the repressive State apparatus and the Ideological State Apparatuses, and between the different State Ideological State Apparatuses. (“Ideology” 101)

The Jacks have successfully manipulated society thus far, which we can see from their current status. We see how adults are able to abuse power with the examples of Bolger in his pawn shop, which I discuss in Chapter One, and the policemen I discuss in Chapter Two. The Jacks seem successful at the point of the “Good Deeds” event, since they are still a very large organization, ensuring social harmony by providing such wonderful things (trips and equipment) to those who need them. Long before we witness the Jacks holding this black tie event, however, we see them trying to control society by hunting down Bod, killing his family, and ultimately relegating the queer figure, Bod, to the margins of their “perfect,” patriarchal society. That Gaiman reveals these “Good Deeds” after we have already marked the man Jack as a monster gives the understanding that the Jacks use their “Good Deeds” to distract society while they actually manipulate situations to make life better for themselves. The Jacks both create and enforce what is normal in the human society outside the graveyard; therefore what is inside the heterotopian graveyard (as I explain in Chapter One) is abnormal, different, *queer*.

The Jacks are also the only stereotypically gendered characters in the narrative, which is first clearly seen in how the main Jack in the novel is always referred to as “the *man* Jack.” The text reveals how, by just observing the room of their event, you would have no further understanding of what was going on at the event, “although a rapid glance would tell you that there were no women in there. They were all men, that much was clear” (Gaiman 166). Not only are they clearly all men, but they are also all named Jack, a common synonym for “man<sup>5</sup>,” which makes it clear that any individual male who does not embody their idea of masculinity is unwelcome, and subject to their punishment. Therefore, patriarchy is a large

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<sup>5</sup> Many definitions exist for “Jack” in the OED. A few are: “Applied to a man, or the figure of one;” “A man of the common people; a lad, fellow, chap;” and, “*to play the jack*: to play the knave, to do a mean trick” (“Jack”).

part of their dominant ideology. Even the name “The Jacks of All Trades” represents a male focused ideal for their society to embody. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (the *OED*), the term “Jack of All Trades” is: “a man who can turn his hand to any kind (or to many kinds) of work or business” (“Jack of all trades”). This name also creates a stereotype that all men should be able to live up to such a title, which the Jacks in the novel seem to believe as well. For most of the novel, we only experience one Jack—“the man Jack.” We later discover that his name is actually Jack Frost, a name that is usually the personification of wintry weather. Cold and icy, Gaiman’s Jack Frost is a killer, a hunter, who is supposed to be the best man for the job (of murdering Bod). We also discover the surnames associated with some of the other Jacks later in the text, such as: Dandy, Nimble, Ketch, and Tar. Each of these men is an example of stereotypical masculinity, and they all use force to get what they want.

Gaiman is famous for his use of intertextuality, and a quick internet search of “Jack Dandy” will provide many links on Alan Moore’s character “Jack-A-Dandy,” a villain who dresses as a high society gentleman and creates havoc for sport. Gaiman has worked with Moore in the past, and his Dandy seems to be an allusion to Moore’s character as he appears to be in charge of the Jacks organization. Gaiman’s Dandy is described as “a dapper man with silver-white hair” (Gaiman 168) when we first meet him, and later as smelling strongly of cologne. Jack Nimble seems to be a link to the nursery rhyme “Jack be Nimble,” which is fitting as this Jack is sent to catch Scarlett and Bod as they head to the graveyard, along with Jack Ketch. And, according to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Jack Ketch was an “English executioner notorious for his barbarous inefficiency; for nearly two centuries after his death his nickname was popularly applied to all of England’s executioners” (“Jack Ketch”).



Gaiman's Ketch is clutching a black silk cord, that "had been stretched around many necks, over the years, and had been the end of every one of the people it had embraced" (Gaiman 266). Meanwhile, Jack Tar is a popular term for a sailor—a traditionally masculine occupation. Each of these references is to a trait or profession that has been traditionally identified as masculine, which shows a sameness among the Jacks that provides them with the ability to be interchangeable with each other. Contrastingly, a child called Nobody could never be just any old Jack. Bod becomes a queer figure in the sense that he is not strictly gendered as male, not even having a "masculine" name like Jack.

We see what really frightens the Jacks, and what they would hate Bod becoming, when the man Jack and Silas are compared against each other, creating a binary between these two monstrous figures (which I explore fully in my previous chapter). Whereas the man Jack is used to being the frightening figure in most, if not all, situations, here Silas appears as an intimidating stranger: "The man Jack looked up at the stranger, and it was the man Jack who was troubled" (Gaiman 18). Silas appears to be a more frightening figure than the man Jack, actually causing the man Jack to be frightened, perhaps because Silas threatens everything the man Jack thinks a man should be. Shannon Winnubst focuses on the otherness of vampires in her article, "Vampires, Anxieties, and Dreams: Race and Sex in the Contemporary United States," explaining "The vampire is thus neither subject nor Other. The vampire, that crosser of boundaries extraordinaire, is forever haunting because he is forever beyond the grasps of straight white male subjectivity" (8). Silas enters the story as a protective figure to a child, which is traditionally a feminine role. He is also a solitary figure having no permanent ties to any social groups or family. Meanwhile, the Jacks embody that traditional straight male subjectivity as they work for the continuance of their fraternal

organization by any means necessary. Silas is the embodiment of what the Jacks are trying to destroy and/or prevent. He is not stereotypically masculine and he does not abide by any societal constructions—he doesn't even follow the traditional, mythological vampiric role as I display in Chapter Two. Silas represents what Bod could potentially become if not successfully eliminated from the social order of the Jacks: a being that crosses the boundaries of normal and other. Being a vampire, Silas is immortal, defying the traditional rules of death—as Bod does when Silas rescues him and provides a way for Bod to live amongst the dead. Meanwhile, we see the man Jack age by the end of the novel when he enters as Jack Frost. Silas is also a “good monster” – one who uses his monstrous powers for good. If raised by Silas, Bod can disrupt the boundaries of good and evil just as his guardian does, perhaps even more so since Bod is ostensibly more subject to the rules of human society. Together, Bod and Silas can disturb the control the Jacks hold and challenge their dominant ideology.

It becomes clear that the Jacks are the ruling ideology of the society in which they live, and they work hard to keep that power and control over everyone else. Even their “Good Deeds Done” seem to be an illusion for society so the Jacks can remain in control. The announcement of the good deeds—“hospital equipment bought in the previous year from their generosity. (‘Not one, not two, but *three* kidney machines’)” (Gaiman 169, original emphasis)—is background noise within the text while the real information comes from a hushed conversation between the man Jack and Mister Jack Dandy. This conversation reveals the darkness underneath the front of helpfulness for society as they discuss how the man Jack has still failed to kill Bod, and they seem to be running out of time:

“*Ten years,*” he said. “Time and tide wait for no man. The babe will soon be grown. And then what?”

“I still have time, Mister Dandy,” the man Jack began, but the silver-haired man cut him off, stabbing a large pink finger in his direction.

“You *had* time. Now, you just have a deadline. Now, you’ve got to get smart. We can’t cut you any slack, not any more. Sick of waiting, we are, every man Jack of us.” (Gaiman 169, original emphasis)

This conversation exists as the focus of this short interlude, revealing how badly the Jacks need Bod dead, and the fear of what he will become if he lives. This is furthered by Dandy’s “every man Jack of us” comment, displaying how the fraternity relies on sameness. Where originally Bod threatened their society mainly due to the prophecy, he has now been living in the graveyard and developing a liminal identity very similar to that of Silas. He has also been developing monstrous powers (as I discuss in Chapter Two) that he uses for good, complicating the Jacks’ black and white mentality.

In the way Bod (like Silas) contradicts the stereotypical norms and dominant ideology set by the Jacks (in relation to masculinity, as well as monstrosity), he develops as a queer character. Bod is a gender neutral character—not only could his name refer to male or female, but it could also apply to *nobody* at all, which marks him as very different from the average somebody. He complicates reality as he walks between the worlds of the living and the dead, and also develops as a solitary individual who definitely will not become a “follower” like most of the Jacks. As the Jacks pride themselves on their fraternal, masculine organization, Bod is now more of a threat than just having the starring role in the prophesy—he embodies the abnormal in the eyes of the Jacks; he is someone they could never control. As I discuss in my introduction, *The Graveyard Book* is a crossover text, reaching adults, children, and adolescents alike. The *Harry Potter* series is similarly regarded as crossover

literature, and Annette Wannamaker discusses this series in *Boys in Children's Literature and Popular Culture*. Wannamaker addresses the gender portrayals within *Harry Potter*, noting:

These complex novels function in a space between, where dominant ideology is simultaneously reinforced, challenged, and negotiated. These books are ultimately popular with so many child and adult readers not because they didactically advocate *either* feminist or patriarchal ideals but because, through their complex portrayal of characters, gender, and relationships, they depict the anxieties, tensions, and uncertainties about contemporary gender roles that readers of all ages are continuously working to define and negotiate. (122)

While I have set up my argument to show that the Jacks are negatively, and aggressively, trying to reinforce patriarchal ideals, these anxieties about gender are still present in the tension between Bod and the Jacks. Bod is not a figure actively fighting the patriarchy—he is an individual who wants to continue being an individual in the way he is comfortable. Bod passively challenges dominant norms—passively because he is usually unaware of what he is doing—and through his actions we see such norms negotiated for readers.

When Bod is eleven years old, entering those crucial early adolescent years, he attends school for the first time and finally experiences some human interactions. The school, as it is often portrayed in adolescent literature, is a microcosm of the larger society outside of it. Althusser describes how the school “constitutes the dominant Ideological State Apparatus, the Apparatus playing a determinant part in the reproduction of the relations of production” (“Ideology” 106). The school is where the dominant ideology can be reinforced to the future members of society, who will eventually further reinforce that same ideology. That ideology

is threatened when people, or students, realize that they don't like or agree with the norm. When Bod is in school, he continues to challenge societal norms, a state which is addressed by a school bully, Mo Quilling. Mo tells Bod, "'You're weird... You don't have any friends,'" and whereas most kids Bod's age would probably be self-conscious about such a statement, Bod simply responds, "'I didn't come here for friends... I came here to learn'" (Gaiman 192). Readers know that Bod has his own, unique challenges growing up in the graveyard, but Gaiman brings in Mo and a couple other human characters as displays of ordinary, human issues as well. Mo responds to Bod's last comment, "'Do you know how weird *that is*?' She asked. 'Nobody comes to school to *learn*. I mean, you come because you have to'" (192, original emphasis). Gaiman's word choice here is key: "Nobody" is Bod's whole name, and he *is* in school to learn, subverting Mo's reasoning as she says it, which most readers (child or adult) will likely pick up on. The word play proving Mo wrong (or right) is not the only point here; Bod *does* want to go to school to learn, and he is comfortable as a solitary figure, like Silas. While Mo is clearly trying to intimidate Bod by arguing that it is strange for someone to *not* want friends and *to want* to learn, it doesn't work. Bod is an individual who refuses to be influenced or intimidated by bullies into accepting the "norm;" instead, Bod accepts his otherness.

Bod is able to develop his othered identity precisely because the Jacks forced him into the secluded graveyard—an action that the Jacks are partially unaware of, but still falls under their control over society. The Jacks are able to remain in control with their ability to regulate what is accepted to be inside their social order, and what needs to be forced out. Althusser describes how dominant ideologies form "imaginary representations:" "It is not their real conditions of existence, their real world, that 'men' 'represent to themselves' in ideology, but

above all it is their relation to those conditions of existence which is represented to them there. It is this relation, which is at the center of every ideological, i.e., imaginary, representation of the real world” (“Ideology” 111). In other words, the RSA holds a dominant ideology because the men involved in it believe they need to express their power and hold society together the right way (their way). The Jacks force Bod out of their society of living humans because he threatens their dominant ideology, and they believe it is their right and responsibility to do so.

The Jacks’ attempt to prevent Bod’s existence in the first place actually provides Bod the ability to be just what they wanted to avoid. It is Bod’s lack of stereotypical masculinity, his ties to the fantastic world of the graveyard, and his desire to be a solitary individual that makes him even queerer in relation to the Jacks. Wannamaker discusses how performing gender identity relies “on creating a border between self and other, between outside and inside, between subject and object, and between the normal represented by the social body and the abnormal represented by those relegated to its margins” (96). Bod is able to live away from the Jacks’ traditional society and grow as a queer individual precisely because they forced him into the graveyard, to the margins of their society.

Bod’s living in the graveyard is a direct result of the Jacks’ oppression. In *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature*, Roberta Seelinger Trites states that in such situations when people are oppressed by the state they see “power as something that conspires against them. An alternate way of thinking of power is in terms of subjectivity, in terms of the individual’s occupation of the linguistic subject position” (5). Bod and the Jacks do exist in opposition to each other in many aspects, but they also have similar traits as well. They both have specific roles in this power dynamic that Trites refers to, and they both

have monstrous qualities. Adolescent literature “very self-consciously problematizes the relationship of the individual to the institutions that construct her or his subjectivity” (Trites 20). Once Bod reaches his adolescent years (the second half of the novel) he is more aware of the man Jack and the danger that comes with him, and Bod knows that it is because of the man Jack that he lost his biological family and lives in the graveyard. When it comes to possibly interacting with the man Jack, as seen in Bod’s conversation with Silas in this chapter’s epigraph, Bod declares, “The question isn’t ‘who will keep me safe from him?’...No. It’s ‘who will keep him safe from me?’” (Gaiman 180). While he enjoys his life in the graveyard, Bod still feels animosity toward the man Jack. It is through the prophecy related to the Jacks directly, made within this oppressive society, that an individual is created—an individual who unknowingly rebels against all patriarchal, societal norms even with his name: Nobody Owens.

The Jacks are a social force that has played a significant role in creating who Bod is. Trites describes how within adolescent literature protagonists need to be aware of the social forces that have influenced who they have become: “They learn to negotiate the levels of power that exist in the myriad social institutions within which they must function, including family; school; the church; government; social constructions of sexuality, gender, race, class; and cultural mores surrounding death” (3). The Jacks not only cause Bod’s otherness, but they do so by embodying the majority of these social forces Trites refers to, as demonstrated by their “Good Deeds.” They use their government-like force to kill Bod’s biological family, believing in the absolute binary of life and death, as well as hide the event and the surviving toddler in order to protect themselves. The murder of his family eliminates the chance for Bod to have a “normal” upbringing and enables him to form his monstrous identity (as I

establish in Chapter Two). As Cohen explains, “Every monster is... a double narrative, two living stories: one that describes how the monster came to be and another, its testimony, detailing what cultural use the monster serves” (13). In the role the Jacks play in Bod’s development, Bod becomes the monstrous figure calling for cultural change. But, in every way he exists, Bod draws light to the monstrosity that is the controlling Jacks, and unconsciously fights against everything they rely on by simply being the liminal figure he is.

Bod’s beliefs are constantly in opposition with the beliefs of the Jacks. Through their patriarchal ideals and views on society, which they use to control others, along with the attempted murder on our protagonist, the Jacks are the villains within the novel. They use horrific means in order to suppress society and squash out any whispers of individualism. These violent means can be seen with the multiple interactions between the Jacks and Bod: when the man Jack attempts to kill Bod, when we discover that nice Mr. Frost is actually the man Jack, and when Bod is locked in Abanazer Bolger’s pawn shop. We see the Jacks’ influence on Bolger when he locks up Bod in a back room, and then takes out a business card: “There was no name or address printed on it, though. Only one word, handwritten in the center in an ink that had faded to brown: *Jack*. On the back of the card...Bolger had written instructions to himself...as a reminder...how to use it to summon the man Jack. No, not summon. *Invite*. You did not summon people like him” (Gaiman 127, original emphasis). In this instance where Bolger is working for the sake of greed and monetary gain, a societal value promoted by the Jacks, Bod is trying to do something selfless—buy a headstone for his friend Liza—but is stopped by the Jacks’ force. It is clear that Gaiman is commenting on both the idea of evil and societal norms; when adolescents are forced to fight the structures surrounding them, “they must reckon with both their sense of individual power and their



recognition of the social forces that require them to modify their behaviors” (Trites 6). In the instance with Bolger, Bod had to recognize that he was not powerful enough to enter the world outside the graveyard and interact with humans just yet; he learns that it is inside the graveyard that he holds the most power as I discuss in Chapter One.

Bod must modify his behavior to manipulate the situation again later in the novel when we find out that Mr. Frost is the man Jack and he lures Bod into the original crime scene to try killing Bod again. Bod flees the scene, knowing that he cannot win in this place outside the graveyard, and lures the Jacks to his home so he can have the advantage in fighting them, strategically using his monstrous abilities to defeat “every man Jack.” It is at this point, when we see Bod utilizing his abnormal “Freedom of the Graveyard” abilities, that he successfully subverts and overcomes the Jacks’ rule. As the Jacks rely on their masculine, physical strength, Bod manipulates them within the graveyard in all the ways he knows how because of his upbringing with the dead. First, he takes care of Jack Ketch (the executioner): “The Jack called Ketch saw the boy in front of him. He pulled his black silk cord tight between his hands...The boy [signaled by a ghost] turned around, and Jack Ketch made a leap towards him— And Mr. Ketch felt the world tumbling away beneath him” as he fell into an old grave (Gaiman 267). Here Bod contrasts the stereotypical physical strength by using his wit and manipulating the situation to get the upper hand.

We see Bod outsmarting the physical Jacks again when he is cornered by three of them at once. He tempts them, “‘Come and get me.’ ... The blond man grinned, the bull-necked man lunged, and—yes—even Mr. Dandy took several steps forward” (Gaiman 271). Each Jack determines to exert physical strength over Bod, whereas Bod uses his wits and the graveyard to trick the men, two of whom fall through the ghoulish gate into another fantasy

world. Bod might be capable of monstrous abilities, but he continues to exist as the good figure compared to the evil Jacks; he informs Mr. Dandy about the ghoul-gate:

“There’s a desert down there. If you look for water, you should find some. There’s things to eat if you look hard, but don’t antagonize the night-gaunts. Avoid Ghûlheim. The ghouls might wipe your memories and make you into one of them, or they might wait until you’ve rotted down, and then eat you. Either way, you can do better.”...Mr. Dandy said, “Why are you telling me this?”

Bod pointed across the graveyard. “Because of them,” he said, and as he said it, as Mr. Dandy glanced away, only for a moment, Bod Faded...

[Mr. Dandy] thought he heard a voice say, “Ghoul-gates are made to be opened and then closed again. You can’t leave them open. They want to close.” ... Mr. Dandy fell, would have fallen into the darkness, but he caught hold of the fallen headstone, threw his arms about it and locked on. He did not know what was beneath him, only that he had no wish to find out. ... He looked up. The boy was there, looking down at him curiously.

“I’m going to let the gate close now,” he said. “I think if you keep holding onto that thing, it might close on you, and crush you, or it might just absorb you and make you into part of the gate. Don’t know. But I’m giving you a chance, more than you ever gave my family.” (Gaiman 272)

This scene with Mr. Dandy proves that our hero is, indeed, a hero. He exhibits noble qualities, even when forced to interact with the embodiment of evil—still giving Jack Dandy a chance to choose his method of destruction. While we can look at Bod here and claim that

he is using his dark, monstrous powers to hurt others, it is arguably justice, and fair justice as he's not actually killing any of the Jacks, just expelling them into different fantastic worlds.

In modeling his own identity after his guardian's, Bod becomes a monstrous figure as well. Cohen explores different theories of monsters, and one in particular is relevant to the kind of "monster" we can think of Bod as: "the monstrous offers an escape from its hermetic path, an invitation to explore new spirals, new and interconnected methods of perceiving the world" (7). In this sense, we can look at Bod as a liminal character in how he is alive and living with the dead, by living between the worlds of the graveyard and the outside society, as well as being in between childhood and adulthood. As he embodies these many aspects of liminality, Bod observes the world from a perspective that works within all of these statuses, eliminating any constructed "normal" societal ideas. Stewart writes, "adolescence requires young people to begin to act on their own beliefs and accept the consequences of those beliefs" (96). This acting and accepting is precisely what Bod comes to do throughout the novel: making choices and dealing with the consequences. His beliefs are formed through his separation from the outside society of the Jacks, which provides Bod with a new way and space to explore the world, a way that ultimately works for him. Existing in the liminal space that they do, young adults are the ideal characters to break societal constructs and expose new truths within a story line.

Gaiman writes a story where the reader can not only explore breaking boundaries surrounding traditional gender roles, but where she can also see the power behind doing so. Through his queerness Bod is the monster threatening the Jacks' society, and the Jacks are displayed as monsters to our protagonist, and therefore to the reader as well. Gaiman inverts the ideas of otherness and monsters to show how evil those in power within the story really

are. Trites explains, “The social power that constructs [adolescent protagonists] bestows upon them a power from which they generate their own sense of subjectivity. As acting subjects, they assume responsibility for their position in society” (7). It is through his actions against the Jacks that Bod can take responsibility for his own unique societal position. He is able to achieve this feat through his queerness, establishing an individualistic mentality that subverts the Jacks’ dominant societal power.

The binary between the Jacks and Bod creates an unknowing rebellion on Bod’s side. The Jacks are everything that our narrator is not; they are the villains who want Bod dead. But, they also serve as character foils for Bod to help reveal his humanity. It is through this binary that we can clearly see Bod’s identity as an individual. Trites states, “Adolescents do not achieve maturity in a YA novel until they have reconciled themselves to the power entailed in the social institutions with which they must interact to survive” (20). Bod accepts the kind of monster he has become, and approaches life with a very individualistic mentality after he overcomes and destroys the Jacks. While the Jacks represent organization and a structured, stable society that works within one place, Bod intends to enter the world and never remain in one place. In the final interaction between Bod and the man Jack, the man Jack asks Bod if he wants to know the name given to him by his first family, and Bod responds: “I know my name...I’m Nobody Owens. That’s who I am” (Gaiman 282). While this moment is monumental in Bod’s identity development, it is also a difficult situation. What if his biological name was Jack? By choosing not to acknowledge that possibility and remaining Nobody, Bod represents the chance for change, choice, and the ability to be an individual. He enters the world with a small suitcase containing all of his belongings and a passport with the name “Nobody Owens.”

## Chapter IV— When Nobody Becomes Somebody

As I have shown in my previous chapters, Bod has anything but a “normal” upbringing during his time in the graveyard. This upbringing has provided Bod with the ability to form a unique identity, and whereas many adolescents are trying to fit into the larger social order, Bod has no problem being regarded as different. In Chapter Three I made it clear that Bod is what the Jacks fear; Bod challenges their societal order, and thus, becomes a queer monstrous figure. Through living his entire life liminally in the graveyard, Bod moves through various developmental stages in very specific ways, and forms an intriguing identity for himself based on the important, monstrous figures who surround him. Bod develops as an individual who is, and always will be, classified as “other” within “normal” human society, ultimately causing him to become an abject hero figure.

Before we can see Bod as an abject figure, we need to look back to where he took a very different path than most living humans—the humans he was originally supposed to be like. Jacques Lacan’s theory of the mirror-stage provides a model of identity development according to which a child grows to belong and become one of the Others<sup>6</sup> surrounding him. Bod falls into a distinct situation as his human parents are taken from him and he enters a world with new Others in the graveyard on which to base his future identity. Furthermore, while he becomes part of the graveyard society, he remains “othered” from it because he is alive.

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<sup>6</sup> Here, “Others” refers to any human part of the society the subject is expected to become a part of. Not to be confused with my referring to Bod as an “other” because of his difference. For this chapter, I will capitalize the former to differentiate my terms.

When Bod escapes the man Jack and enters the graveyard he is adopted and raised by ghosts and other mythical creatures during what Lacan would refer to as Bod's *infans* stage, which is before the child forms speech and is still dependent on others looking after and taking care of him. This is a period of time before the subject "is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the [O]ther, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject" (Lacan 1124). In this phase the child is not yet bound by the classifications of the symbolic that surface when he enters into the world of subjectivity, as he lacks the ability to communicate verbally with those around him. Therefore, Bod leaves one world that he does not fully belong to yet and enters another, altering the course of his humanity and subject/identity formation. According to Lacan, you come into being as a subject at the point when you subject yourself to Others, and your identity forms as a combination of what you have imagined for yourself, how you relate yourself to Others, and how Others classify you. Before one reaches such a state, while still in the *infans* stage, one forms a fictional reality, or an ideal identity during what Lacan terms the mirror stage. It is during this stage that Bod escapes from the man Jack, is adopted by his new ghostly (i.e., invisible) parents, and begins developing an identity within the socially invisible world of the graveyard, as I discussed in Chapter One.

Bod comes of age in the fantastical world of the graveyard, where he is othered in multiple ways: he is othered from normal society because he lives amongst the dead in a graveyard, and he is also othered from his cohabitants within the graveyard because he is still alive. During the *infans* stage, children begin to form ideas of what they should be within what Lacan terms the Imaginary. In her book, *Looking Glasses and Neverlands: Lacan, Desire, and Subjectivity in Children's Literature*, Karen Coats discusses the Imaginary

within such young adult texts as *Peter Pan*, and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. She writes, "The Imaginary acts as a support for the Symbolic...Imaginary relationships are characterized by a complete coincidence of self and other, which is, of course, an illusion, but a necessary one" (20). Lacan's "Imaginary" does not indicate some kind of reality, or lack thereof, but rather a mental state that everyone experiences as they learn to navigate into the Symbolic. In the immediate aftermath of losing his parents, Bod forms such Imaginary relationships with ghosts and a vampire to determine how to form his own identity in their image, thus complicating his identity as a human. Within the graveyard he has discovered a way that he can both live among the dead and still avoid his own death in the world outside it. It is also at this point that he is given the name "Nobody," disappearing from one world and becoming a being very othered from it. The relationships that he forms and the subject he becomes work together to create a unique, empowering identity for Bod to exemplify. In the act of merging reality with fantasy, as I discuss in Chapter One, Bod's identity becomes ambiguous; he becomes Nobody, a boy living among the dead.

His name, "Nobody Owens," is the first mark of Bod's otherness; it is given to him by his new adopted family on the night Bod comes to the graveyard. The members of the graveyard start to argue about what to call the baby, naming people they knew, and claiming that he looks like this one or that one, when Mrs. Owens puts an end to the squabbling: "'He looks like nobody but himself,' said Mrs. Owens, firmly. 'He looks like nobody.' 'Then Nobody it is,' said Silas. 'Nobody Owens'" (Gaiman 25). Again, it is both Mrs. Owens and Silas working together, declaring that Bod resembles "nobody" and giving him a name that differentiates him from anyone else. No character or reader (most likely) will ever meet another Nobody. Coats discusses names, or the lack thereof in *Alice's Adventures in*

*Wonderland* when Alice becomes unsure of her name and who she is: “Without her name, she can truly function as an *objet a*, for she will have lost the last designator of her identity in the Symbolic” (*Looking* 88). It is as if by taking away all labels, including a name, a freedom from subjectivity is created and the subject is able to realize a whole identity for the self.

What Bod experiences is slightly different: he is not kept nameless but is given a name that marks him as non-existent, as Nobody, and continues to keep this identifier with him even when he leaves the graveyard. His name or no-name removes him from the normal world and hides him from his pursuer, the man Jack. This also creates part of his identity, as the child becomes Nobody, very different from a subject that is somebody (or even “any old Jack”).

Though Bod does escape influence from the normal human society, his mirror-self is influenced by the beings that now surround him in this fantasy world. Coats describes this aspect of the mirror-stage:

The child looking into a mirror sees an idealized image of his potential. This image, in its specular completeness, is at odds with how he *experiences* his body. His trajectory of becoming is toward the image; he takes its completeness, fantasized as it is, as his goal. Though he may experience himself as fragmented and incomplete, he can imagine himself as whole, and it is toward this imaginary ideal that he moves. But he does not experience this imaginary ideal only in an actual mirror. Other people provide ideal images for him to mirror. (*Looking* 6)

The subject strives to become a being based on who surrounds him, even if his body is unable to commit the way his mind wants to. The figures surrounding Bod the majority of the time are ghosts, a vampire, and a werewolf.—all liminal, transformative, less-than-idealized



selves. As I display in Chapter Two, Silas assumes the role of the main figure Bod aspires to be like because of their mutual otherness from both the graveyard society and the world outside of it.

When Bod first enters the graveyard, Silas is the one who saves him by tricking the man Jack into leaving—protecting Bod without even yet knowing who this baby is. Coats states, “All humans ... are born prematurely, and ... it is the task of someone else to save their lives” (15). Coats refers here to all human infants who are dependent on someone else—usually the mother—caring for them. It is fitting that Silas, a vampire, takes on this usual motherly role, displaying his own gender queerness that Bod later comes to embody as well. Silas becomes Bod’s mirror image to base his own identity development on. Mrs. Owens also remarks how Silas is a welcomed outsider within the graveyard, similar to what she wants Bod to become. In her article, “Decentering the Postmodern: The Ex-Centric,” Linda Hutcheon writes, “The modernist concept of single and alienated otherness is challenged by the postmodern questioning of binaries that conceal hierarchies (self/other)... Difference suggests multiplicity, heterogeneity, plurality, rather than binary opposition and exclusion” (Hutcheon 61). While both Bod and Silas seem not to belong to either the world of the living or of the dead they still embody qualities of both worlds, creating self-identities that work within their othered statuses. Ultimately, what matters is not so much how they live on the borders between these two worlds, but rather the fact that they challenge the boundaries between them by existing in both worlds simultaneously.

While Bod does become a somewhat mythical being himself through being granted the “Freedom of the Graveyard,” which allows him to see in the darkness and causes him to be unnoticeable to other living humans, he is still human. Bod takes lessons in the graveyard,

and the ghostly Mr. Pennyworth tries teaching him “practical matters,” like Fading. On one occasion when Mr. Pennyworth asks Bod to demonstrate his Fading, “Bod’s heart sank. He took a deep breath, and did his best, squinching up his eyes and trying to fade away. Mr. Pennyworth was not impressed” (Gaiman 105). As Bod is a human, attempting to attain qualities of the dead (or undead), his body is at odds with his ideal image. He eventually does succeed in overcoming his human limitations for the remainder of his time in the graveyard by gaining help from his dead witch friend, Liza. When Bod tells Liza that, no matter how hard he tries, he still cannot Fade, she tells him, “It’s because you’re alive... There’s stuff as works for us, the dead, who have to fight to be noticed at the best of times, that won’t never work for you people” (Gaiman 131). Despite her pointing out his definite otherness, Liza casts a spell to help Bod Fade successfully. Throughout his identity development Bod continues to blur the lines between human and creature, and, as in this scene, between an individual and communal identity.

While Bod exists in the mythical graveyard, he becomes aware that it is not normal for humans to live amongst the dead. Besides certain members of the graveyard referring to him as “the live one,” a young girl, Scarlett, briefly comes to the graveyard when Bod is around five years old. Bod begins interacting with Scarlett and comes to the realization that she is what is considered normal outside the graveyard. Scarlett becomes Bod’s link to the living world, and when Scarlett describes Bod to her parents, her father “said that he believed that imaginary friends were a common phenomenon at that age, and nothing at all to be concerned about” (Gaiman 42). Scarlett’s father’s declaration places an interesting identifier on Bod as a subject. Coats discusses how, as others provide identifiers for a subject, they begin to define the subject, possibly inaccurately, and these identifiers form a political

identity for the subject. This outside-formed identity causes the subject to then become what people say he is: an assigned identity that is usually embraced by the subject. Bod never denies being imaginary, and in his silence he acknowledges that this might be true. Again we have a link to his name – the imaginary Nobody is a distinct contrast to the real somebody, in this instance Scarlett. Yet, while he might appear to be an imaginary being to the outside world, as readers we realize that he is in fact a real boy living in a graveyard, a knowledge solidified by the several occasions where he interacts with humans who live in the world outside.

Through the course of the novel, Bod must create his “othered” identity through a series of experiences and interactions. For example, when Bod is around the age of twelve, moving into his adolescent years, he tells Silas that he wants to go to school. He argues, “There’s a world out there, with the sea in it, and islands, and shipwrecks and pigs. I mean, it’s filled with things I don’t know. And the teachers here have taught me lots of things, but I need more. If I’m going to survive out there, one day” (Gaiman 180). Bod recognizes the fact that he cannot live in the graveyard forever and that he will one day have to grow up and enter the normal world of the living, and in order to do so he needs to learn things about that world. Coats writes, “The adolescent moves back in developmental time to the mirror stage, when questions of alienation and identification, separation and the establishment of boundaries between the me and the not-me, need to be resettled” (Coats 144). This return to the mirror stage that Coats refers to is separate from the earlier one, as it is at this point that the adolescent is aware of his subjectivity and is able to decide on the ideal image he wishes to become. As Bod knows he will one day need to submerge himself in the outside human world, he needs to reexamine the boundaries separating that world from the graveyard, while

he is still able to access the graveyard. Bod chooses to subject himself to the humanity of the outside world, expressing his power as a subject in making choices and declarations for himself that allow him to figure out how he will fit into and interact with the living human society.

When Bod attends school he becomes the model pupil in a way only Nobody can: “No one noticed the boy, not at first. No one even noticed that they hadn’t noticed him...he faded, in mind and in memory...Even the kids forgot about him. Not when he was sitting in front of them: they remembered him then. But when that Owens kid was out of sight he was out of mind” (Gaiman 182). When interacting with the normal society outside of the graveyard, Bod truly lives up to his name: he is Nobody. His whole name, Nobody Owens, sounds a lot like “nobody owns,” as in nobody owns this body. Bod falls into what Coats describes as “the category of abject hero—ordinary people who refuse to reintegrate into society under its terms but instead haunt and disrupt its borders” (149). As I made clear in Chapter Two, Silas had the most significant impact on Bod’s identity development. Bod and Silas challenge the boundaries between the worlds in which they live through their monstrous identities. They both interact with the living and the dead, and can move between these worlds with minimal effort. Meanwhile, most everyone else they interact with (both living humans as well as graveyard inhabitants) is limited to the rules of either the world of the living or of the dead.

It is easy for Bod to imagine himself to be just like Silas in the future, but Bod comes to learn that his guardian is even more othered than our othered protagonist. When Bod is about ten years old, he experiences the “Danse Macabre,” a dance where the living and the dead interact with each other and where Bod witnesses his fantastic world intertwine with the

outside human world with which he is also linked. One day, Bod hears members of the graveyard speaking excitedly about the upcoming event and, as with all his inquiries, he seeks out Silas for information. Silas tells him it's a dance, and we see how these two liminal figures are slightly different after all:

“*All must dance the Macabray*,” said Bod, remembering. “Have you danced it? What kind of dance is it?”

His guardian looked at him with eyes like black pools and said, “I do not know. I know many things, Bod, for I have been walking this earth at night for a very long time, but I do not know what it is like to dance the Macabray. You must be alive or you must be dead to dance it—and I am neither.”

Bod shivered. He wanted to embrace his guardian, to hold him and tell him that he would never desert him, but the action was unthinkable... There were people you could hug, and then there was Silas. (Gaiman 149)

This conversation is both evident of the strong bond between Bod and Silas, and the fact that Silas is actually more othered than Bod. It is clear that Bod is alive, and therefore can fit into the human society outside more fully than Silas. Also, Bod is unable to comfort his guardian as Bod himself would want to be comforted. While Bod might imagine Silas as an ideal figure to aspire to be like, this moment signifies that Bod might not want to be *just* like Silas after all. Hutcheon explains, “Meaning can be created only by differences and sustained only by reference to other meaning. Difference is therefore the very basis of the Lacanian definition of the split subject as a meaning-producing entity, itself constructed from a system of difference” (65). A subject can discover who he is by seeing what he is not. By viewing

how Silas is even more different than Bod is, Bod can acknowledge which world he is most like, and this brings him closer to an understanding of his personal identity.

Before the dance, Bod joins the other living humans as an observer, watching as more people enter the town square, and he thinks, “*Is this what living people do?...*but he knew it was not: that *this*, whatever it was, was special” (Gaiman 156, original emphasis). The way Bod’s thought begins indicates that he does not consider himself a living person or, at least not a “normal” living person. Despite his self-association with the dead, however, he dances on the side of the living without any conscious thought or decision. It is clear that Bod is aware of his own liminality, as he interacts with living humans periodically throughout the text while he lives in the graveyard, but his identity has been greatly influenced by the monstrous creatures surrounding him in a way that makes him identify more with them. Nevertheless, Bod enjoys this moment, when his two worlds are finally intertwining. The fact that his guardian cannot take part causes Bod to realize that he is not quite as othered as Silas and that, unlike Silas, Bod will eventually merge with the living successfully.

The day after the “Danse Macabre” Bod is still full of excitement and wishes to talk about the fantastic event to everyone, which forces him to realize that he is also actually different than all of his cohabitants in the graveyard. When Bod starts to talk about the dance with Josiah Worthington, a ghost, Josiah exclaims, ““The dead and the living do not mingle, boy. We are no longer part of their world; they are no part of ours. If it happened that we danced the *danse macabre* with them, the dance of death, then we would not speak of it, and we certainly would not speak of it to the living”” (Gaiman 163). Josiah uses the pronouns “we” and “they,” when speaking of the dance, but points out he would not discuss it with the living—signifying that Bod is not included in the “we,” but in the “they.” Not realizing what

this means at first, Bod argues, “‘But *I’m* one of you,’” and Josiah answers, “‘Not yet, boy. Not for a lifetime.’ And Bod realized why he had danced as one of the living, and not as one of the crew that had walked down the hill, and he said only, ‘I see . . . I think’” (Gaiman 163, original emphasis). Here Bod finally realizes where he actually belongs; he is alive and, therefore, should be with the living.

Bod is clearly still struggling with this realization of where he belongs, and as he cannot get anyone in the graveyard to talk about the amazing event that merged his two worlds together, Bod turns to the one figure he can always rely on. Bod approaches Silas for validation:

“You were there last night...Don’t try and say you weren’t there or something because I know you were.”

“Yes,” said Silas. . . .“You saw it! You watched us! The living and the dead! We were dancing. Why won’t anyone *talk* about it?”

“Because there are mysteries. Because there are things that people are forbidden to speak about. Because there are things they do not remember.”

“But you’re speaking about it right now. We’re talking about the Macabray.”

“I have not danced it,” said Silas.

“You saw it, though.”

Silas said only, “I don’t know what I saw.”

“I danced with the lady, Silas!” exclaimed Bod. His guardian looked almost heartbroken then, and Bod found himself scared, like a child who has woken a sleeping panther. (Gaiman 164)

Bod yearns for validation that his two separate worlds did indeed come together, with the seemingly childish hope that this union could happen again in his future. Silas's pain in this scene could be caused by several reasons. One of these reasons could be seeing Bod's hope that his worlds could coexist permanently, when Silas knows that Bod will have to choose one and leave the other behind eventually. Silas also knows that Bod's dance with the Lady on the Grey signifies Bod's mortality. When Bod dances with the Lady he comments on how impressive her horse is, and she responds "'He is gentle enough to bear the mightiest of you away on his broad back, and strong enough for the smallest of you as well.' 'Can I ride him?'" asked Bod. 'One day,' she told him, and her cobweb skirts shimmered. 'One day. Everybody does'" (Gaiman 161). Clearly, the Lady is Gaiman's version of the Grim Reaper, but she is a much more welcoming and comforting sight, though one Silas will never experience.

Bod develops in a way that allows him to function in different societies by watching and becoming like Silas. Bod falls under the definition of an abject hero: "as an outsider, he or she has an intensely ambivalent relationship toward the walls that prevent him or her from fitting in" (*Looking* 138). Bod is well aware of how he is different from the subjects in normal society, but he holds onto these differences, embodying qualities of both worlds as he starts to move between them. Julia Kristeva elaborates on how the abject is defined by defying definition, but it is *something*, something unrecognizable:

What is abject...is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses ... I endure it, for I imagine that such is the desire of the other. A massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically



separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A ‘something’ that I do not recognize as a thing. (Kristeva 2)

The abject is constantly contradicting what it could be and what it is not—existing in a constant state of indefinable limbo, as Bod does with his liminal existence as he balances his living humanity with his fantastic identity and abilities, such as Fading. This limbo is exactly where Bod exists, in a world that is out of the sight and mind of most average humans, where he lives among the dead, is on the line of human and monster, and is also on the line of child and adult just like every adolescent. It is during his adolescence that Bod is forced to recognize his abject identity. Coats writes:

We think of adolescence in terms of the way it, like abjection, breaches and challenges boundaries. It is an in-between time, a time where what we know and believe about children is challenged, and where what we hope and value about maturity is also challenged. Adolescents are both more and less sophisticated and knowing than we want them to be. They challenge the borders of identity, trying to become adult without becoming adulterated. (*Looking* 142)

Bod’s existence in the graveyard defies what the average person thinks of as an ideal place for a child as he is surrounded by death. Bod also challenges the idea that children and adolescents somehow need to be protected from the world by successfully navigating horrible situations, such as single-handedly taking on five murderous men at the end of the novel. Through his monstrous/human qualities, Bod challenges the borders of identity as he navigates between his mythological home-life and the normalcy of the outside human world.

Bod embodies the abject and threatens the definition of human, especially the norm set by the controlling Jacks. Bod “is the abjected fragment that enables the formation of all kinds of identities” (Cohen 19), including every identity that challenges the Jacks. In Chapter Three I discuss Bod as a queer figure in relation to gender, as his identity develops with Silas as the goal-ideal image, which disrupts the Jacks’ power. In *Boys in Children’s Literature and Popular Culture*, Annette Wannamaker writes, “The gendered foundation of the subject is always tenuous because identity must be established in opposition to an abject, and that abject always threatens the subject at the same time as it works to construct it” (128). The gendered foundation within *The Graveyard Book* is the Jacks, and Bod and Silas are the abject figures threatening them through their queerness. Bod is the revolting figure for the Jacks’ gendered foundation, threatening the norms of society as he lives on the borders of human and mythological, planning to enter the human society full of anybodies as Nobody. In the way the Jacks work to rid their society of Bod, it is clear that Bod is a threat to their masculine order. Wannamaker explains how gender identity *needs* to be established as contrasting to the abject, a condition that makes gender performance visible. Yet: “The very existence of an abject threatens borders, threatens to engulf, enter, seep into, or leak out of both social and individual bodies... if the identity borders we erect were indeed ‘natural’ and fixed, then they would not always and continuously need to be reestablished” (Wannamaker 96). If the Jacks were a natural order, they would have no need to suppress this queer, abject child.

But the abject can also be appealing; we see this in the way Bod desires to be like Silas, and in the way Bod himself is the hero of the story. It is through Bod’s liminal status that Bod embodies the abject, and uses this marginalized, “othered” position to gain power.

Hutcheon states, “The single concept of ‘otherness’ has associations of binarity, hierarchy, and supplementarity that postmodern theory and practice seem to want to reject in favor of a more plural and deprivileging concept of difference and the ex-centric” (65). It is a common idea that if you are not one thing, then you must be another. But within this postmodern idea of otherness that Hutcheon refers to and that Bod embodies, it is clear that binaries are not so distinct. Bod is not one or the other; he is both. He is able to identify with both the living, as he is mortal, and the dead, as he can Haunt and Fade as if he were a ghost.

Bod also experiences the world outside the graveyard as not part of the self, knowledgeable of how he differs from the normalcy of it. For instance, Bod starts having some trouble in school with a few of his peers: “He was becoming a presence, rather than an absence, and that made him uncomfortable. Silas had warned him to keep a low profile, told him to go through school partly Faded, but everything was changing” (Gaiman 192). Whereas other living humans interact with each other, and enjoy being noticed, Bod views this attention as troublesome and uncomfortable. A few of his peers also call him “Bob” instead of Bod, and he never corrects them. Though most people are very particular about their names, claiming “It’s who I am,” Bod really doesn’t seem to care. But, when Silas recommends that Bod stop going to school because of the increasing attention that he is receiving, Bod asks him, ““Do you know how nice it is to be in a room filled with people and for all of them to be breathing?”” (Gaiman 193). *Breathing*, what signifies life in a human body, what the average human neglects to think about because it seems like such a trivial given, is what Bod finds extraordinary. Bod then debates running away: “He would go somewhere no one knew him, and he would sit in a library all day and read books and listen to people breathing” (Gaiman 197). The idea of being surrounded by people who would all

be breathing is remarkable, and yet Bod knows other people don't think of such things—for him, the normal is fantastic. It is also interesting that he would want to sit and read books all day, what many people do in order to experience a fantasy world like the one Bod lives in every day (just as readers of *The Graveyard Book* do). Yet, Bod considers giving up this fantasy world and his fantastical Freedom of the Graveyard abilities to live like an average human does—a metafictional moment, reminding readers to live their own lives while they read.

Throughout the text, with characters like Silas and the man Jack, Gaiman blurs the lines of human and monster thoroughly, as I discuss in previous chapters. This fact is clear in the development of Bod's personal and communal identities. He accepts his otherworldly (monstrous) abilities as normal, but others sense these qualities and label him as strange and other. Bod's personal identity becomes a combination of the normal and the mythological. Coats writes,

There are some people—the abjects—who are neither subject nor object ... They do not disavow the terms of subjectivity itself; they know precisely that accession to the Symbolic comes only through being subjected to the Name of the Father. They know, too, as Lacan points out, that “once the subject comes into being, he owes it to a certain nonbeing upon which he raises up his being” (*Seminar II* [SII], 192). They simply choose...to organize their existence around the pole of that nonbeing. (Coats 145)

Bod, as abject, has formed his identity around an imaginary ideal. Silas is the mirror-self, a parental figure for Bod, and definitely a nonbeing that influences Bod's coming into being. As Bod's mirror-self within the graveyard is defined under fantasy, for him to become a

subject he will have to forfeit many of the aspects associated with this part of his life when he enters the normal living world. But, he will always carry the name “Nobody,” neglecting to be subjected to the Name of the Father; therefore, Bod will always be abject, never making that final step into the Symbolic of the living human society.

Though Bod is always aware that he has special abilities that other living humans do not, he refuses to accept that this fact matters. He never expresses any desire to become wholly part of the normal society, but is content with being abject to the normal humans outside. Bod and the man Jack come into a situation where it seems like Bod might actually die, and this conversation ensues:

“You want to know your name, boy, before I spill your blood on the stone?”

Bod felt the cold of the knife at his neck. And in that moment, Bod understood. Everything slowed. Everything came into focus. “I know my name,” he said. “I’m Nobody Owens. That’s who I am.” And, kneeling on the cold altar stone, it all seemed very simple. (Gaiman 282)

In this instant Bod comes to his own assertion of who he is, and he also becomes a subject that can protect himself. He accepts his identity as Nobody, and knows that he will not want to be anybody else in his life to come—because every “anybody” is “normal” and that is what is abject to our protagonist. Lacan states, “In the recourse of subject to subject that we preserve, psychoanalysis may accompany the patient to the ecstatic limit of the ‘*Thou art that,*’ in which is revealed to him the cipher of his mortal destiny, but it is not in our mere power as practitioners to bring him to that point where the real journey begins” (1128). In other words, the subject comes to terms with who he is, realizing his true identity. It is here,

in this realization, that an individual can become subject and move forward in life. Bod recognizes that he has become Nobody Owens, a result of a traumatic past where his fantastic self merges with the reality surrounding him. If Bod allowed the man Jack to tell him “who” he was through his old name, it would have altered his identity as Nobody, but being Nobody will provide a more appealing, adventurous journey for Bod.

It is at this point that Bod is finally forming a solidified self-identity, choosing who he will be for the rest of his life. As Nobody, Bod prepares to move beyond his inside fantastic world of the graveyard and enter the outside reality of living society. Lacan regards “the function of the mirror-stage as a particular case of the function of the *imago*, which is to establish a relation between the organism and its reality—or, as they say, between the *Innenwelt* [or inner world] and the *Umwelt* [or outer world]” (1125). Bod’s adolescent mirror-stage serves to reestablish both how he views himself and how he will relate himself to the world outside the graveyard, where he will live out the rest of his life. When Bod finally comes to the point where he has to enter the real, “normal” world of the living, he struggles with growing up, asking Silas:

“There’s a whole world out there. Can I see it? Can I go there?”

Silas nodded. “There is a whole world out there, yes. You have a passport in the inner pocket of your suitcase. It’s made out in the name of Nobody Owens. And was not easy to obtain.”

Bod said, “If I change my mind can I come back here?” And then he answered his own question. “If I come back, it will be a place, but it won’t be home any longer.” (Gaiman 304)

Bod comes to understand that he must acknowledge the outer world as his new permanent home. With that, Bod leaves the graveyard, with a small suitcase and a passport with the name “Nobody Owens.” When finally completing the coming-of-age process, Bod sacrifices his safe graveyard home along with his mythical abilities and is “left with a pale memory of [their] pleasures...the sacrifice is not optional or voluntary if you want to function in the Symbolic” (*Looking* 93). This is the final step in the process of coming into being where you form an identity after adolescence, and if you wish to function in the real world, you must sacrifice your fictional (or in Bod’s case, fantastical) ideal identity.

At the end of the novel it seems like Bod is moving out of the fantasy world and into the Symbolic of normal human society, but what does the reality outside of the graveyard hold for a subject raised as Bod was? Lacan writes:

I have myself shown in the social dialectic that structures human knowledge as paranoiac why human knowledge has greater autonomy than animal knowledge in relation to the field of force of desire, but also why human knowledge is determined in that “little reality”...These reflections lead me to recognize in the spatial captation manifested in the mirror-stage, even before the social dialectic, the effect in man of an organic insufficiency in his natural reality—in so far as any meaning can be given to the word “nature.” (1125)

Lacan refers back to the *infans* stage as being the most natural point of a being’s reality. If we can believe that, then as an identity forms primarily around the similar adolescent mirror-stage, the subject in question should be able to hold onto that identity and carry out his life, not caring if others classify him as “other.” Since both Bod’s *infans* stage and adolescence were spent developing as a subject within the graveyard, he will definitely carry that identity

with him as he enters the outside human world, causing a continued otherness from normal society, but also creating a unique self for him to identify with. Bod acknowledges for himself that the graveyard will no longer be home, but it will always be a crucial part of him and his identity formation as a subject.



## Conclusion

*The Graveyard Book* is a story about life. Despite being surrounded by death, Nobody Owens successfully develops a unique individual identity through growing up in the liminal world of the graveyard. During his time there, the graveyard serves as a protective heterotopia for Bod, a place for him to remain hidden from the evil outside his home. Bod's time in the graveyard also serves to display for him, as well as for readers, that real (human) monsters exist and that they can be defeated. And, as nobody's perfect, sometimes to defeat those monsters one might need to become slightly monstrous oneself. It is within his heterotopian graveyard that Bod comes to see life as truly fantastic—to enjoy being surrounded by people who are all *breathing*.

Shortly after Bod defeats the man Jack, when he is fifteen years old, things begin to change for him, again a key characteristic of adolescence, as adolescents are experiencing their bodies changing through growth and puberty; “Sometimes he could no longer see the dead...At first it had only happened occasionally, but now it seemed to be happening more and more” (Gaiman 295). This change signifies that Bod is growing out of the graveyard, sacrificing the home he had there. Even though he is no longer able to see all of the dead as he once did, Bod commits them all to memory as he spends his last days in the graveyard. Bod changes and grows throughout the entire book, while the rest of the graveyard inhabitants remain the same in their dead states. On his last day in the graveyard Bod has a few important conversations, the first of which is with Mother Slaughter, one of the older ghosts:

“Here, boy!” she called. “There’s nasturshalums growing wild over here.

Why don’t you pick some for me, and put them over by my stone. ... I called

you *boy*, didn't I? But time passes in the blink of an eye, and it's a young man you are now, isn't it? How old are you?"

"About fifteen, I think. Though I still feel the same as I always did," Bod said, but Mother Slaughter interrupted, "And I still feels like I done when I was a tiny slip of a thing, making daisy chains in the old pasture. You're always you, and that don't change, and you're always changing, and there's nothing you can do about it." (Gaiman 297)

This conversation serves to prepare Bod for his life outside the graveyard, where he will still be himself and he will still always be changing. It is time for Bod to leave the graveyard, and face the future as most adolescents do: with fearful excitement as they leave their childhood homes behind. For Bod, this means entering the world of the living. Bod has a last conversation with Silas, who is also preparing to leave the graveyard:

"You're really leaving? But. You're my guardian."

"I *was* your guardian. But you are old enough to guard yourself. I have other things to protect." ... "Can't I stay here? In the graveyard?"

"You must not," said Silas, more gently than Bod could remember him ever saying anything. "All the people here have had their lives, Bod, even if they were short ones. Now it's your turn. You need to live." (Gaiman 302)

Again, we see it is Bod's difference from the other members of the graveyard that reminds him to have a life—a life outside the graveyard, because the graveyard is only full of death and lives that have been frozen in time. Bod comes to this realization, and plans on living out his life by seeing every part of the world he can.

The last conversation that Bod has with someone from the graveyard is with his mother, Mrs. Owens:

“Hullo, Mother,” said Bod.

Mistress Owens rubbed her eyes with a knuckle, then dabbed at them with her apron, and she shook her head. “Do you know what you’re going to do now?” she asked.

“See the world,” said Bod. “Get into trouble. Get out of trouble again. Visit jungles and volcanoes and deserts and islands. And people. I want to meet an awful lot of people.” (Gaiman 306)

Mrs. Owens then sings to Bod, a song she used to sing when he was little. The last lines are, “Face your life/Its pain, its pleasure, Leave no path untaken,” and Bod responds, “‘Leave no path untaken’ [...]. ‘A difficult challenge, but I can try my best’” (Gaiman 306). Here we again see the crossover aspect of *The Graveyard Book*; while this moment is one that nearly every adolescent goes through, it is also one that nearly every mother or parent experiences as well. Mrs. Owens is aware that she will never see Bod again, and she hopes that she did her job as a mother successfully now that she has to let him leave her protection and live his life. At this point, it doesn’t matter that Bod had a unique upbringing in the graveyard. Here, he is just like every other adolescent and the world is at his disposal. Gaiman’s final lines are:

There was a smile dancing on [Bod’s] lips, although it was a wary smile, for the world is a bigger place than a little graveyard on a hill; and there would be dangers in it and mysteries, new friends to make, old friends to rediscover, mistakes to be made and many paths to be walked before he would, finally,

return to the graveyard or ride with the Lady on the broad back of her great grey stallion.

But between now and then, there was Life; and Bod walked into it with his eyes and his heart wide open. (Gaiman 307)

This moment is the goal of adolescence: making the decision about how to explore the world and spend one's life. Bod might not be able to see in the dark, walk through graves, or Fade any longer, but he is obtaining another whole set of abilities that will enable him to live. And his time spent in the graveyard has prepared him to be himself, even if he's othered from the rest of society. Hutcheon writes, "There have been liberating effects of moving from the language of alienation (otherness) to that of decentering (difference), because the center used to function as the pivot between binary opposites which always privileged one half...the 'old either-or begins to break down,' as Susan Griffin put it and the new and-also of multiplicity and difference opens up new possibilities" (62). Instead of the subject being forced into choosing one or the other, he comes into being where various identifiers can coexist. Bod enters the world outside the graveyard, leaving the place behind for good, but he is the subject he has become because of it so it will never completely fade away, even if his fantastic abilities do.

Since Bod does not care what others think about him, he allows himself a unique independence. He comes to his own understanding of the world and develops an identity that allows him to cope with being different, or maybe not different so much as unique. One of the last things Bod tells Silas is, "I want to see life. I want to hold it in my hands. I want to leave a footprint on the sand of a desert island. I want to play football with people. I want," he said, and then he paused and he thought. "I want *everything*" (Gaiman 304, original

emphasis). This dream that Bod desires is not rare; it is actually quite *normal* to want so much. If such an abject subject could come to have such normal desires, then he should be able to survive in a world where he might be considered abnormal. Coats states, “The individual personality of the subject, those qualities that fill out the structures of his subjectivity, owes its very existence to the Other’s language” (*Looking* 29). The subject comes into being when he subjects himself to the dialectic of the people of the society he is becoming a part of. As he knows the language of the graveyard, despite being othered from it, he will learn to navigate through the normal human society as well. While growing up in the graveyard will affect his future communal identity as he leaves it, a subject that is other like Bod will still embody a contrasting self-identity. No matter how normal Bod might come to seem, he is still entering the world with the name *Nobody*, a signifier that he will never be an ordinary somebody.

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