

## Charon's Forgotten Humanity

Throughout history, the art of storytelling has gifted listeners to themes of growth, change, and discovery. The tales we most often see, ones which follow the hero's journey and their path from one part of life to the next, align with the classic liminal loop that we observe. This journey from structure into chaos and back into a new realm often does not occur by the mindset and actions of the main subject alone, however. It is often achieved by the aid of other onlookers and acquaintances who help drive forward the progression of liminal discovery for the main character. These liminal guides are an integral component to the stories we have come to cherish, yet they are often an underrepresented perspective to see. The greatest impact I recognized when reading the tale *The Ferryman and His Brother*, was this new perspective of the role of the liminal guide, more so than that of the liminal souls themselves. I found a new appreciation through this story, as I felt an awareness of how grueling and difficult a task it truly seems to be to guide such intense liminal experiences. I think we too often forget about these liminal guides, and how they are only human as well.

The creativity behind this story, and the dark side of liminality which it explored, drew me into this tale, and the unique and eerie details it emphasized. Death, and the experience of being near it is one of the most significant examples of liminality we can witness as humans, and the themes of death and its attributes being so prominent in this story only added to the liminal details and their significance. In Greek Mythology, it isn't uncommon to overlook the experience of the guide across the river Styx into the Underworld, so to finally consider deeply what this figure must see from his perspective was a foreign idea to me, but one I was glad to find. I found sympathy for the narrator, and his brother as well, each of them encountering countless newly deceased souls each day without relief. Not only this, but so many of the lost souls would place

blame upon the narrator or his brother for their deaths. Although they took on a role no larger than just transporting them from one plane of existence to the next, those granted passage across the river went along with so unknowing how it was not their fault. Perhaps this detail reflects the tendency for us all to place blame upon those around us while we experience a traumatizing liminal loop. In real life, just like the lost souls of this tale, it is easy to lose sight of the overarching experience we have encountered, and instead turn toward those surrounding us, perhaps the ones offering us a push forward into progress, and loathing them for assisting a necessary yet uncomfortable liminal path. It can be easy to see the ones closest to us while enduring the obstacles of our most difficult times, and decide to cast hatred and shame for those who are only present, rather than being appreciative or acknowledging of the good they truly do for the progression of our lives. I had not before reflected so deeply on this idea, of how important these liminal guides truly are for us, nor had I considered how simultaneously difficult it can be. It can be a nice reminder sometimes, that the liminal guide experiences their own journey of chaos and restructure as they aid those as well.

The traumatic effects taken on by the two brothers as they witness so much death, is perhaps even more clearly seen by the behaviors of the ferryman's brother. The narrator recalls some of the most brutal and vicious times in the history of humanity, including war and murder, and how defeated and heartbroken his brother became due to such times. He would curse the job that ironically was initially intended to be the ferryman's instead, and often there were times that the narrator had to beg his brother to continue with his important role. What the ferryman began to rely upon, and what he encouraged his brother to hold onto as well, were the sometimes fleeting moments of light brought by the souls they oversaw, due to the lingering effects of joyful lives these people still held onto. The ferryman described his longest and most difficult trips

across the river as ones where he would grant passage to dark, shadowy souls, who died by tragic or harrowing means. It was these jobs as the liminal guide for which they took on the most despair and distress, and when they both felt the pull toward giving in most intensely. However, despite the saddening effects of so many gloomy crossings, there were many described by the ferryman that would replenish some of his hope. In the end, he begs his brother to see these glowing and shining moments in the sea of darkness where they live, and hold onto what this means rather than dwell only on the visions of agony they so often face. His brother is reminded of selflessness, love, and joy that can sometimes leak into the usually defeating moments of life, and this provides the push of motivation to continue onward, because not all death is limited to a grim connotation. The ferryman hopes for his brother, that he finds more focus for the positive, and he hopes for the world itself, that there is still enough light within it that it has not consumed all. I think more than anything there is something to be said that a ferryman who has encountered the situation of every person who has ever faced death, would still find enough purpose in his heart to hold worry and hope for his brother and the world they watch, despite all he has seen.