Charlotte Smith’s Sonnet XLIV (1789):
Written in the churchyard at Middleton in Sussex

Press'd by the Moon, mute arbitress of tides,
While the loud equinox its power combines,
The sea no more its swelling surge confines,
But o'er the shrinking land sublimely rides.
The wild blast, rising from the Western cave,
Drives the huge billows from their heaving bed;
Tears from their grassy tombs the village dead,
And breaks the silent sabbath of the grave!
With shells and sea-weed mingled, on the shore
Lo! their bones whiten in the frequent wave;
But vain to them the winds and waters rave;
They hear the warring elements no more:
While I am doom'd—by life's long storm opprest,
To gaze with envy on their gloomy rest.

Middleton is a village on the margin of the sea, in Sussex, containing
only two or three houses. There were formerly several acres of ground
between its small church and the sea, which now, by its continual
encroachments, approaches within a few feet of this half-ruined and
humble edifice. The wall, which once surrounded the church-yard, is
entirely swept away, many of the graves broken up, and the remains
of bodies interred washed into the sea; whence human bones are
found among the sand and shingles on the shore. [Smith's note]
The sea no more its swelling surge confines,
But o'er the shrinking land sublimely rides.
"Liminal” Scenes and States

The word “liminal” relates to many interests associated with Romanticism.

Liminal (adj.) =
“Relating to a transitional stage or occupying a position on or at both sides of a boundary.”

At the brink, at the edge, at the threshold—or going beyond, crossing over, transgressing, glimpsing at the other side.

Sublime = awesome, uplifting.
As if at a height of being, beyond which one can hardly imagine.

Limit = a boundary.
Limbo = caught between two states.
Subliminal = beneath a threshold.
“Liminal” Scenes and States

**Liminal (adj.)** =
“Relating to a transitional stage or occupying a position on or at both sides of a boundary.”

**Settings:**
– Edge of the sea
– Mountains and cliffs
– Beyond familiar terrain

**States of Being:**
– Childhood, from innocence to experience.
– Life and death, an interest in death in life.
– The supernatural (mystery & magic).
– Outcasts: the poor, vagrants, & wanderers.

**Mental states & psychological extremes:**
– Going from present to past by means of memory and reflection.
– Interest in dreams and nightmares.
– Interest in drug use (opium).
– Interest in madness.
Monk by the Sea, Caspar David Friedrich (1809)
Seashore by Moonlight, David Caspar Friedrich (1834-5)
Sonnet LXX: On Being Cautioned Against Walking on an Headland Overlooking the Sea, Because It Was Frequent by a Lunatic (1797)

Is there a solitary wretch who hies
To the tall cliff, with starting pace or slow,
And, measuring, views with wild and hollow eyes
Its distance from the waves that chide below;
Who, as the sea-born gale with frequent sighs
Chills his cold bed upon the mountain turf,
With hoarse, half-utter'd lamentation, lies
Murmuring responses to the dashing surf?
In moody sadness, on the giddy brink,
I see him more with envy than with fear;
He has no nice felicities that shrink
From giant horrors; wildly wandering here,
He seems (uncursed with reason) not to know
The depth or the duration of his woe.
“A defiant attitude toward limits”

- A salient trait of Romanticism is “a defiant attitude toward limits” (NA 19).

- “The Romantic period, the epoch of free enterprise, imperial expansion, and boundless revolutionary hope, was also an epoch of individualism in which philosophers and poets alike put an extraordinarily high estimate on human potentialities and powers” (NA 19).

- “In representing this expanded scope for individual initiative, much poetry of the period redefined heroism and made a ceaseless striving for the unattainable its crucial element” (NA 19).

- “Viewed by moralists of previous ages as sin or lamentable error, longings that can never be satisfied—in Percy Shelley’s phrase, ‘the desire of a moth for a star’—came to be revalued as the glory of human nature” (NA 19).

- The restrained and polished quality of Pope’s poetic verse—compressed and confined in its neat package of heroic couplets—suggests a notable contrast with the ideals associated with Romanticism.
The Bard,
John Martin,
1817
Manfred on the Jungfrau, John Martin, 1837