



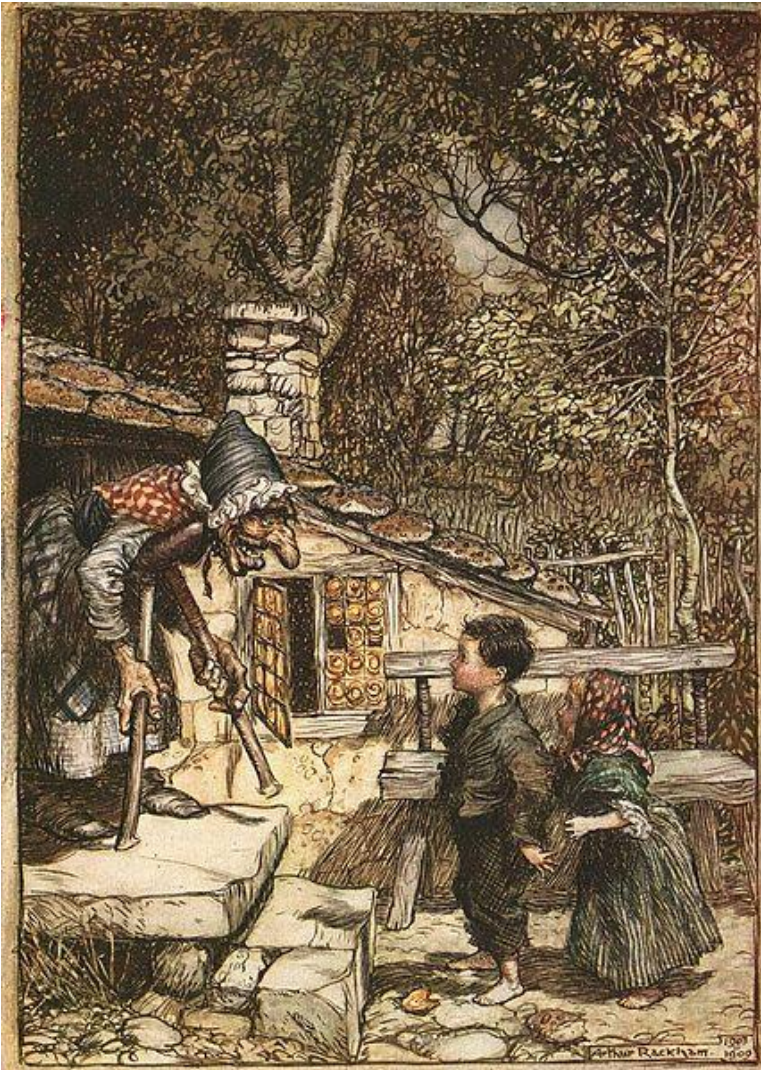
Arnold van Gennep (1873-1957):
French ethnographer and
folklorist

Liminality

- Latin: *līmen* (“threshold”)
- originally an anthropological term (coined by van Gennep)
- denotes the quality of ambiguity or disorientation that occurs in the middle stage of rituals
- during a ritual’s liminal stage, participants “stand at the threshold” between their previous way of structuring their identity, time, or community, and a new way, which the ritual establishes

Liminality

- used in literature to suggest places, times, or characters that represent some in-between status
- a liminal state produces fluidity that enables new institutions and customs to become established
- Example (place): in fairy tales, forests and woods are liminal zones where the normal rules of society break down, creating a proximal space where magic flourishes; yet it is not quite the world of gods and demons either



Hänsel und Gretel



Yoruba face mask

Liminality

- The concept of liminality is central to many religions.
- Example: in shamanistic religions, a human enters an ecstatic state (through ritual and sometimes drugs), becoming not quite human, not quite divine; s/he serves as intermediary between the world of people and the world of the gods
- Example: in the Catholic church, the Mass is a ritual drama that mediates between two states of being, culminating in the transubstantiation of the Host and the communion of the congregation with God; worshipers leave transformed and ready to serve



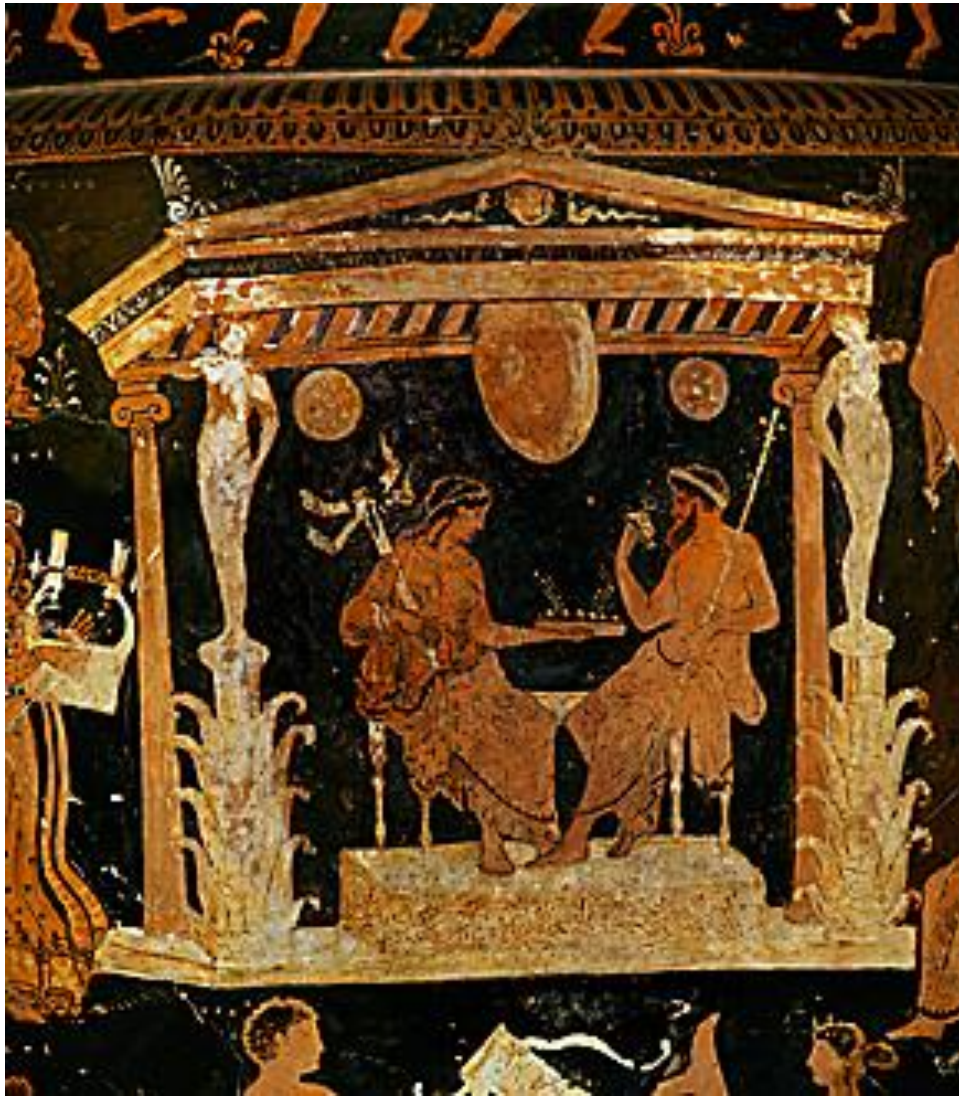
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Liminality (summary)

- denotes a state of being “in between”
- used in literature to describe, places, people, and times
- suggests either the possibility of permanent transformation or the temporary break with the status quo (to be re-established later)
- **things and concepts are possible which would otherwise be impossible; context changes to allow for new states of being**



Orpheus/Ede?



Hades/market
place?



**Eurydice/
Maria?**



**Maenads*/
crowd in the
marketplace?**

***worshippers of the god
Dionysus, god of wine and
ritual madness (*ekstasis*)**



**Asé and the
spirit
forms,
prophets,
sorcerers?**