The Final Frontier: Fictional Explorations of the Borders of Nature and Fantasy in Early Twentieth-Century Imaginative Literature

Martin SIMONSON
UPV/EHU (University of the Basque Country)
Email: martin.simonson@ehu.eus
ORCID: 0000-0003-3576-4636

Abstract
In this paper, I argue that the tension between tradition and modernity which operated upon the mind of many writers in the early twentieth century was frequently articulated around the dichotomy between the city and the country. As in the Romantic period a hundred years earlier, the “country” was associated with autochthonous cultural traditions, folklore, myth and imagination, and seen as a place of escape from a dreary and prosaic industrialised reality. For many writers of the Edwardian period, the countryside turned into a liminal space capable of hosting the presence of both imagination and reason, myth and realism, the native and the foreign, safety and threat. This is frequently seen in the works of Edward Thomas, Arthur Machen and Algernon Blackwood, who each in his own way, and with different results, negotiated the liminal space between the Edwardian everyday reality and the potentially wonder-inspiring world of nature, with its half-hidden historical, mythical and supernatural depths, lurking at the very borders of perception.

Keywords: Liminality; Literature of Place; Fantasy Literature; Horror Literature; Edwardian Literature; Thomas, Edward; Blackwood, Algernon; Machen, Arthur