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THE ELUSIVE PARADISE:

A STUDY OF W.H. HUDSON

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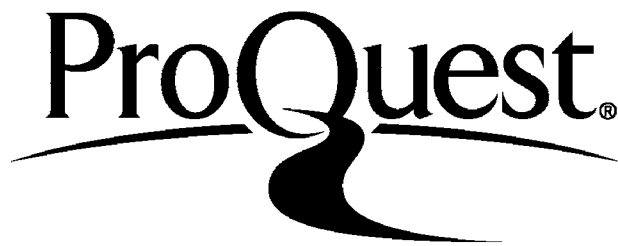
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ABSTRACT

I will argue in this thesis that W.H. Hudson's fiction and non-fiction share the same symbolic substructure: that of the elusive Paradise. Through attention to the concrete details of the world, in certain moments at least, Hudson apprehends an invisible or supernatural dimension. These moments might appropriately be termed epiphanic. What I shall call 'affirmative' epiphany affirms the earthly by revealing the divine through or within it; it is either directly paradisiac, or assimilable to a vision of the earthly Paradise. In contrast to the 'affirmative' epiphany, there is also 'negative' epiphany which opens up a chasm of terror and dread. Violence, affliction, and human submersion in evil are amongst the things that play into the notion of 'negative' epiphany. I will also show that, in Hudson's fiction, there are indications that evil is written into the network of chance and natural law; so that the 'darkness' or evil disclosed by 'negative' epiphany can be seen as ontologically prior to the actions of the human will. The paradisiac endures as a fractured and elusive subject of experience, constantly threatened by contingency, violence, or evil. I will also show how, for Hudson, rationalistic and mechanistic ideologies (especially Darwinism) are an obstacle to consistent belief in the spiritual.

In this thesis I will attempt to redress the tendency to concentrate on Hudson first and foremost as a nature writer by giving priority to his fiction, which develops the mythopoeic or symbolic aspects of his vision to a greater extent and, I will argue, for this reason involves a deeper or more profound expression of that vision. In Part One I will be using examples from his non-fiction in my examination of his fundamental concerns; in Part Two I will show how these concerns are developed at a greater depth in his fiction.

## Abbreviations Used in Text:

|   |              |
|---|--------------|
| <u>Adventures Among Birds:</u>                                    | <u>AAB.</u>  |
| <u>Birds and Man:</u>   | <u>BM.</u>   |
| <u>The Book of a Naturalist:</u>                                  | <u>BN.</u>   |
| <u>A Crystal Age:</u>   | <u>CA.</u>   |
| <u>Dead Man's Plack and An<br/>    <u>Old Thorn:</u></u>          | <u>DMP.</u>  |
| <u>El Ombú:</u>   | <u>EO.</u>   |
| <u>Far Away and Long Ago:</u>                                     | <u>FALA.</u> |
| <u>Green Mansions:</u>  | <u>GM.</u>   |
| <u>Hampshire Days:</u>  | <u>HD.</u>   |
| <u>A Hind in Richmond Park:</u>                                   | <u>HRP.</u>  |
| <u>The Land's End:</u>  | <u>LE.</u>   |
| <u>Letters from W.H. Hudson<br/>    <u>to Edward Garnett:</u></u> | <u>LWHH.</u> |
| <u>Men, Books and Birds:</u>                                      | <u>MBB.</u>  |
| <u>Nature in Downland:</u>  | <u>ND.</u>   |
| <u>The Purple Land:</u>   | <u>PL.</u>   |

INTRODUCTION

1

The disparity between W.H. Hudson's reputation during his lifetime (or at least, in his last years) and for some time after, and the general dissolution of that reputation is so marked, and the extent of the former reputation so largely forgotten, that some details demand to be set down as an indication. A re-examination of Hudson's work needn't speculate on the reasons for this disparity - and I will not attempt to do so here - but in remarking the disparity it can at least give some indication that Hudson's present position of marginality should not be taken for granted.

To give some idea of how marginal a figure Hudson is now considered, we might consider a few contemporary books on the history of English literature (including those specifically on post-Victorian and modern writers). In such works as Arnold Kettle's An Introduction to the English Novel, Vol. 2: From Henry James to 1950, Raymond Williams' The English Novel: From Dickens to Lawrence, F.W. Bateson's A Guide to English Literature, and Peter Quennell's A History of English Literature, there is no mention whatsoever of Hudson. The list could be greatly extended. Where Hudson is mentioned in such works, it is usually as a non-fiction writer, so that his important fictional works - and the interrelationship between the fiction and the non-fiction - are neglected or obscured. In A.C. Ward's Illustrated History of English Literature, Vol. 3: Blake to Shaw, we find (as the complete account of Hudson):

W.H. Hudson... among numerous writings on birds and animals, achieved a masterpiece of the Wiltshire countryside in A Shepherd's Life (1910) and a fine autobiography treating largely of his childhood in Argentina, Far Away and Long Ago (1918). 1

In his Twentieth-Century English Literature: 1901-1960, Ward singles these two books out at the expense of the fiction, saying that:

Imaginative romance was not his natural field. He was happier in a form which allowed direct transmission of his extraordinarily acute faculty of observation, and in the discursively personal books he is most truly himself....

(He goes on to say that A Shepherd's Life 'is a book to stand with Walton's The Compleat Angler and White's Selborne', while Far Away and Long Ago 'is more than a plain autobiographical record. It abounds in remembered beauties and wise reflections.')

<sup>2</sup> Samuel C. Chew and Richard D. Altick's The Nineteenth Century and After contains a brief paragraph on Hudson in which its authors say that:

[He] is sometimes numbered among writers of fiction, but this is to suggest a false emphasis, for he was a novelist only sporadically and inexpertly. (...) In all [his fiction] the mode of tale-telling is quite artless, dependent upon Hudson's own experiences or upon hearsay. His material was not unlike Conrad's, but though he was that master's admiring friend, he was without Conrad's subtleties in 'arranging' the data stored in memory. <sup>3</sup>

This supposed 'artlessness' would be better described as an impression of effortlessness achieved through skill and a self-conscious, intelligent use of simplicity; so Conrad, amongst others, saw it - Conrad who was, we can say, at least as much Hudson's 'admiring friend' as Hudson was his.

Ford Madox Ford has pointed out that,

Conrad - who was an even more impassioned admirer of Hudson's talent than am even I - used to say: "You may try for ever to learn how Hudson got his effects and you will never know. He writes down his words as the good God makes the green grass to grow, and that is all you will ever find to say about it if you try for ever." <sup>4</sup>

(Ford repeats this in Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance, where he says:

Our greatest admiration [that is, Conrad's and his own] for a stylist in any language was given to W.H. Hudson of whom Conrad said that his writing was like the grass that the good God made to grow and when it was there you could not tell how it came.) <sup>5</sup>

Ford is careful to put this down to skill, especially in regard to selection of details. (He asks: 'But why did Hudson select that exactly right image with which to get in his picture? His secrets were too well protected.')

<sup>6</sup>

At the same time he insists on the resistance of Hudson's technical skill to

any complete or final analysis:

He shared with Turgenev the quality that makes you unable to find out how he got his effects. Like Turgenev he was utterly undramatic in his methods, and his books have that same quality that [sic] have those of the author of Fathers and Children. When you read them you forget the lines and the print. 7

We can gather also from Ford that this high esteem for Hudson was held by many other of his contemporaries. In fact, Ford claims,

there was no one - no writer - who did not acknowledge without question that [Hudson] was the greatest living writer of English.... I have never heard a writer speak of him with anything but a reverence that was given to no other human being. For as a writer he was a magician. 8

Nor was Hudson's fiction excluded from this esteem; Ford, who characterizes Hudson as a 'great imaginative writer', lists Green Mansions, El Ombú and The Purple Land as among Hudson's 'masterpieces'. He writes:

The Purple Land is Romance; it is Romance as it was never before and never again will be put into words.... If I have heard one, I have heard twenty of Hudson's rivals, from Conrad to Maurice Hewlett, or from Galsworthy to the much-too-much-forgotten George Gissing, say that The Purple Land is the supreme - is the only - rendering of Romance in the English language; and if I have heard one I have heard twenty say that Green Mansions is Anglo-Saxondom's only rendering of hopeless, of aching passion. 9

Ford's testimony needn't stand alone; indeed, in so far as his mythomania may lead to some questioning of his reliability as a witness to the opinions of others, it shouldn't be left to stand alone. We can point to the high esteem in which Hudson was held by his contemporaries by quoting from a number of other sources. Ernest Rhys, writing in 1936, stated that Hudson 'is one of the three or four contemporaries of whose survival in English literature I feel most certain'.<sup>10</sup> John Galsworthy said that,

Hudson is, of the writers of our time, the rarest spirit, and has the clearest gift of conveying the nature of that spirit. (...) As a simple narrator he is well-nigh unsurpassed; as a stylist he has few, if any, living equals. 11

He is also, to Galsworthy's mind,

probably the most acute, broad-minded, and understanding of all observers of Nature. (...) But his real eminence and extraordinary



attraction lie in his spirit and philosophy. (...) His work is a vision of natural beauty and human life as it might be, quickened and sweetened by the sun and the wind and the rain, and by fellowship with all the other forms of life - a vision given to us who are more in want of it than any other generation has ever been. A very great writer; and - to my thinking - the most valuable our Age has possessed. 12

Edward Garnett wrote of Hudson:

The range of his emotional powers and poetic vision may be appraised in contrasting aspects in a dozen of his works: but the fascination of his individuality is best declared in his two romances, The Purple Land... and Green Mansions.... The first, the youthful Hudson, contains all the flavour of his ironical humour (tinged with the Spanish courtesy which was his birthright; and set him apart from all other English writers), and all the artistic caprice, passionate warmth and tender sympathy of his temperament.... The graver emotional profundities of Hudson's nature, in all their capacities for tragic passion, and brooding sorrow, are fully manifested in Green Mansions, in 'El Ombú' and in 'Marta Riquelme'. These imaginative romances unlock the very source and centre of Hudson's genius, his wealth of responsive feeling, which inspired the powers of perception and reflection, observation and analytic power of our great field naturalist. (...) He himself had stored up in his soul and had access through his feeling to those immeasurable sources of spiritual life which animate Nature.... His genius, his supremacy over his contemporaries, lay in his full perception of our true relation to the infinite ocean of Nature's fecundity, and in his more delicate response to the mystery and beauty of her multitudinous aspects. 13

Other of Hudson's admirers included Hilaire Belloc, T.E. Lawrence, William James, Edward Thomas, Walter de la Mare, Ezra Pound, Herbert Read, and David Garnett. But I shall select only four further examples of the esteem in which Hudson was held. Pound wrote:

It is perhaps faddism and habit that causes people still to gossip of Poe, when 'El Ombú' has been written, not as a grotesque but as tragic elegy, and as the ordered telling of life as it must have happened. 14

He also said:

The Shepherd' Life [sic] must... be art of a very high order; how otherwise would one come completely under the spell of a chapter with no more startling subject matter than the cat at a rural station of an undistinguished British provincial railway. 15

Belloc said that Hudson's Utopian novel, A Crystal Age, was 'the book he read most often and liked best'.<sup>16</sup> George Woodcock, suggesting the influence of Hudson's novels on Herbert Read's only novel, The Green Child, states that, 'At the end of World War 1, when he was friendly with Ford Madox Ford,

Read read all of Hudson's books, and he shared Ford's high opinion of Green Mansions and The Purple Land.<sup>17</sup> David Garnett states baldly: 'W.H. Hudson... was a great naturalist and a still greater writer of the English language.'<sup>18</sup>

There have been few books on Hudson. With the exception of an early, slight and superficial volume (Harold Goddard, W.H. Hudson: Bird-man, 1928), Samuel J. Looker's compilation of tributes (William Henry Hudson: A Tribute by Various Writers, 1947), and the biographical literature, there are only three, in fact: Robert Hamilton's W.H. Hudson: The Vision of Earth (1946), Richard E. Haymaker's From Pampas to Hedgerows and Downs: A Study of W.H. Hudson (1954), and John T. Frederick's William Henry Hudson (1972). Of these, Haymaker's is definitely the most comprehensive; but Haymaker gives far too little attention to Hudson's fiction. Frederick is also inclined to stress the qualities of Hudson's non-fiction at the expense of the novels and stories. Hamilton's book is a summary account which neglects detailed discussion in favour of a sketchy over-all treatment, and he is all-too-ready to use Hudson as a foil for his own beliefs. All of these authors, of course, hold Hudson's work in high esteem. (Hamilton, for example, says that 'he was a very great English writer'; and that there 'has never been a writer quite like him, nor will there ever be another'.)<sup>19</sup> All of them have valuable things to say, and I have tried to incorporate various of their insights into my treatment of Hudson. But I have chosen to concentrate on Hudson's fiction as the most important part of his oeuvre, because it is there that the symbolic weight and force of his vision is most concentrated and most fully developed. As Ruth Tomalin has said:

The essays often reveal his imaginative gifts, his wide range and poetic vision, as well as his distinguished work as a naturalist. Other writers, however, have given us excellent accounts of nature and the English scene. Only Hudson could have written those tales of mystery and imagination, the South American Romances. 20

None of these writers, either, has delineated adequately the nature of

Hudson's epiphanic vision (by which I refer to a disclosure or manifestation of the supernatural through the natural), nor the way the fiction and non-fiction are interrelated through this vision.

2

Hudson would have preferred to have been forgotten about; he stressed in his will that he didn't want a full-scale biography written, and he systematically destroyed a huge quantity of his letters to prevent anyone using them. 'Of course I can't, dead or living,' he wrote to Morley Roberts, 'prevent people writing about me if they feel "so disposed", but I would far rather be forgotten the instant I quit the scene.'<sup>21</sup> Hudson's attitude towards his writing was such that one gathers he would have preferred to have it forgotten, as well as himself; there was a sort of thorny humility about Hudson, compounded of a bitterness over his long years of poverty and literary obscurity, and a belief that he couldn't quite capture in words the quality of humankind's most profound experiences.<sup>22</sup> He believed that there are experiences, and aspects of the world, which cannot be adequately conveyed in words; these mostly relate to the emotional and spiritual experience of nature and personal being, and should not be confused with the realm of biographical 'fact' (which can convey very little about such experience), nor that of the personality (in the sense of the psychological self) for systems of psychological analysis are, fundamentally, too reductive in their assumptions and procedures.<sup>23</sup> Where I would differ from Hudson is in the belief that writing, through its symbolic dimension, can articulate with profound efficacy those hidden or invisible modalities of being which are experienced as epiphany.<sup>24</sup> I believe Hudson underestimated

the scope and power of art - his own not least.

The process of writing involves an articulation which draws upon transconscious areas of meaning and expression, in such a way as to draw together things that the writer had not intended, or even guessed at, before the process actually takes place. However, if the personality of the writer is what is transcended in the process of writing, it may still be seen as the base from which this transcendence occurs.<sup>25</sup> For this reason, and in order largely to dispense with resorting to biographical details at any later stage of discussion, we can deal with Hudson's life at this point.<sup>26</sup>

William Henry Hudson was born on August 4, 1841, on his father's ranch, near Buenos Aires. Hudson's parents, Americans of British ancestry, had emigrated to Argentina in the 1830s.<sup>27</sup> His upbringing was informed by his mother's religious beliefs, an influence which was to be shaken when Hudson read Darwin's The Origin of Species in 1859. Hudson's early reading included James Thomson, minor poets of the English countryside (Robert Bloomfield and James Hurdis), Sterne's Tristram Shandy, Gibbon, and perhaps most importantly Gilbert White's The Natural History of Selborne. White's book gave Hudson the idea of becoming a field naturalist; poets like Thomson, Hurdis and Bloomfield provided a correlation between poetic expression and affective understanding of nature which, although Hudson only occasionally and indifferently wrote poetry, was important for the type of prose writing he eventually pursued.

When he was fifteen or sixteen, Hudson contracted rheumatic fever, which left his heart permanently weakened; the doctors advised him (incorrectly) that he would not live for very long, precipitating an obsession with death that haunted him for the rest of his life.<sup>28</sup> In 1859, when he was eighteen, Hudson's mother died. This event was very important to him, as he had always felt especially close to her.

In 1866 he began to collect bird-skins for the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, an occupation which, although disrupted by time spent in the Argentinian army as a conscript, he continued in until 1869. He also began sending consignments of bird-skins to two members of the London Zoological Society, Drs. Sclater and Salvin. More importantly, he sent Dr. Sclater a number of letters on the ornithology of La Plata (a district of Argentina) which were published in the Society's Proceedings in 1870 and 1871. In the summer of 1870-71, Hudson made a trip to Patagonia (recounted many years later in his book Idle Days in Patagonia); his findings were published, again in the Society's Proceedings, in 1872, as 'On the Birds of the Rio Negro of Patagonia'; he also brought back specimens of a previously unclassified bird, which was named after him - enipolegus hudsoni, or 'Hudson's tyrant-bird'. As a result of these activities, Hudson was made a Corresponding Member of the Zoological Society (C.M.Z.S.).

Little is known about Hudson's activities from this date until April 1874, when he left Argentina for England.<sup>29</sup> When his father died, in 1868, Hudson felt he had no great personal ties in South America; he hoped to make a career for himself as a writer, and his publications in the London Zoological Society Proceedings had led him to believe that England would be the most obvious place for such a career. Hudson was thirty-three at this time; and it would be another eleven years before he had published his first book, and not for some time later until he began to achieve any sort of acclaim as a writer.

Hudson was loathe to talk about his early years in England, the memories of which were obviously very painful. He collaborated with Dr. Sclater on a book about Argentinean ornithology, but the writing of it was long drawn-out, and Hudson quickly found that his own approach - which depended on affective attunement and response to nature - was the opposite

of Sclater's dry and narrow, pedantic interests. All else that is known of these years is that Hudson tried writing for popular journals (on one occasion, at least, under a female pseudonym) as well as doing the occasional technical piece for the Proceedings; he was also engaged briefly (and on the whole unprofitably) in genealogical research for an unscrupulous employer.<sup>30</sup> He experienced dire poverty at this time, sometimes having to resort to sleeping in Hyde Park.

In May 1876 Hudson married his landlady, Emily Wingrave, who was eleven years his senior.<sup>31</sup> Emily had been a singer in her younger days, and Hudson said that he was first attracted to her through his appreciation of her singing. Hudson admitted (in a letter to Violet Hunt in 1921) that he and Emily had never been in love and had married rather for companionship; but he also said, in the same letter, that Emily was the one person who really knew him.<sup>32</sup> Hudson must have felt bitterly the irony of his situation, though: a man who had formerly roamed the Pampas, he was now cooped up in a boarding-house in London (and Hudson detested cities), too poor to manage more than the occasional outing in the country.

In the late summer of 1880 Hudson made the acquaintance of Morley Roberts, who had come to Mrs. Hudson's boarding-house to visit a friend lodging there. Roberts was then twenty-two years old - Hudson's junior by seventeen years - and although he had not yet started writing seriously, his interest in literature provided the extremely isolated Hudson with stimulus and encouragement in his own writing. Roberts described Hudson as looking,

like a half-tamed hawk which at any moment might take to the skies and return no more to those earth-bound creatures with whom he had made his temporary home. 33

Roberts' friendship no doubt had an inestimable effect on Hudson; he was also able to introduce him to the novelist George Gissing, who was likewise to become a friend. (Roberts however says that 'For Hudson [Gissing's] books

were a pain; they recalled poverty and stress in the past and foreshadowed it in the future.')<sup>34</sup>

Hudson began, in 1883, to publish fiction and poetry in magazines; the story 'Piero Velina's Confession' appeared in the Cornhill Magazine, and the poems 'In the Wilderness', 'Gwendoline' and 'The London Sparrow' were published in Merry England. None of these are of much literary merit; but the following year he brought out his novel The Purple Land that England Lost, originally part of a much longer work entitled The History of the House of Lamb (the rest of which Hudson, at some point, destroyed, along with most of his poems and - it would appear - much else). This was probably written long before its date of publication, although there is no way of being certain of this. The book was not well received, either by the critics or the public; and Hudson's economic situation suffered a set-back when his wife's boarding-house failed in the same year. She obtained the management of a second boarding-house, but this also failed, in 1886. A period of grim poverty ensued, the Hudsons mainly depending on lessons given by Mrs. Hudson in singing and piano-playing. Things were so bad that at one point they had to survive for a week on one tin of cocoa and milk. In this same year, however, Emily Hudson inherited a house in St. Luke's Road, Westbourne Park; they rented out some of the rooms, while Mrs. Hudson continued to give music lessons to supplement this income.

The (anonymous) publication in 1887 of another novel, the Utopian romance A Crystal Age, did nothing to help either Hudson's reputation or their finances; it was as much a failure as The Purple Land that England Lost. The failure of the two novels made Hudson lose confidence in his fiction, and, in Ruth Tomalin's words, he 'turned to factual work in natural history' instead.<sup>35</sup> This is important to bear in mind in relation to Hudson's later attitude to his fiction. Indeed, he tended to be scornful of

interest in the literary merit of any of his writings; the failure of these early novels left its permanent mark on Hudson's mind.<sup>36</sup> Ford Madox Ford says:

He was the gentlest of giants, although occasionally he would go astonishingly off the deep end, as when he would exclaim violently, "I'm not one of you damned writers: I'm a naturalist from La Plata." This he would put over with a laugh, for of course he did not lastingly resent being called the greatest prose writer of his day. 37

Ford is no doubt correct in saying that his disclaimers about being concerned with 'art' were also 'a sort of humility'.<sup>38</sup> Because Hudson's dismissive statements about his fiction are sometimes quoted as actual proof of a lack of genuine interest on his part (a notion that can be undercut through reference to his persistence in writing and publishing fiction - El Ombú in 1902, Green Mansions in 1904, his children's-story A Little Boy Lost in 1905, and Dead Man's Plack and An Old Thorn in 1920; as well as revising and republishing The Purple Land - the original title being so abbreviated - in 1904), it will not be amiss to interrupt this account of Hudson's life to give an account and appraisal of Hudson's attitudes by David Garnett, Edward's son.

Garnett writes:

I remember one occasion when... Edward [told] Hudson that his real talent was in describing character, and that he wasted it writing about adders and Dartford warblers. Hudson suddenly got angry. A red light came into his eyes, and he burst out: "I am a naturalist. I care nothing about people. I write about what I observe. I don't care for made-up stories that amuse people like you."

Edward was secretly delighted at having enraged Hudson and would then pick out some bit from The Purple Land to prove his point, while Hudson glared at him angrily and then subsided, as though Edward were not worth powder and shot, and the red light would go out of his eyes.

My father was being cruel, though not consciously so. For when Hudson began to write his subjects had been people, and he had starved. And it was not until he wrote as a naturalist that he had made a slender living by his pen. He had torn up much of what he wrote, and it came as an astonishment to him that after Edward had coaxed the manuscript of Green Mansions out of him, it should eventually prove the most successful of all his books. (...) Success had come to him in his old age, but instead of mellowing him, as is usual, it had roused and increased his bitterness. Just as when Edward had told him that El Ombú... was a masterpiece, Hudson had glared at him in rage - a rage



not, I think, far from tears - so success when it came seemed a worthless mockery. 39

But before he temporarily abandoned fiction, Hudson published two more novels, Ralph Herne, which appeared serially in an obscure magazine called Youth in 1888, and Fan: The Story of a Young Girl's Life, which was published under a pseudonym ('Henry Harford') in the following year. Neither work has ever been considered of any real literary interest; if they are of interest, it is more as curiosities. Ralph Herne, the story of a doctor in Buenos Aires during the time of a yellow fever epidemic, seems likely to have been an early composition of Hudson's, and is best considered as 'apprentice work'. Fan depicts life in the slums of London in its early chapters, and seems on the whole to have been an attempt on Hudson's part to write the sort of sentimental 'realistic' fiction that was popular at the time, in order to obtain relief from his still poor economic situation. He was mistaken, for the book was a complete failure. Hudson did not publicly acknowledge authorship at any time; but at the end of his life, and much against the advice of Edward Garnett and Morley Roberts, he made arrangements for both Fan and Ralph Herne to be republished after his death as a means of securing money for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (to which he had left all his royalties).<sup>40</sup> Hudson well knew that neither book was any good. David Garnett recalls how, having learned from his father that Hudson was the author of Fan, he obtained two second-hand copies; when he told Hudson,

he looked for a moment as though he thought I were going to blackmail him. (...) ... when I went on to tell him that I had read Fan and that there were parts of it that I liked very much, he was - not angry as he used to be with Edward - but upset. He tried to tell me it was worthless.... 41

Although Garnett goes on to say he thinks the mention of the book brought back painful memories, I think it can be inferred that at least some of these painful memories were to do with the publication of an inferior work for the

sake of money, and the bitterness which he must have felt at the failure of this attempt to ease his financial problems.

In 1888-89 Hudson's collaboration with Dr. Sclater, Argentine Ornithology, was finally issued, in two volumes. This was essentially a scientific work, which Hudson had found 'from the first a source of exasperation and bitterness': 'All the antagonism of poet to pedant, and of outdoor to indoor naturalist', had pervaded Hudson's work with Sclater.<sup>42</sup> Hudson later took out all his own material from the book and published it as a single volume under the title of Birds of La Plata (1920); but he confided to Roberts, 'It was my poverty that made me allow it to be re-published. It wasn't worth it.'<sup>43</sup> In 1892 he published a volume of his naturalistic observations in Argentina, The Naturalist in La Plata. This book 'was immediately hailed as a classic' and declared by Alfred Russel Wallace to be 'altogether unique among books on Natural History'.<sup>44</sup> The vividness of Hudson's descriptions, the sensitivity and accuracy of his observations, together with his prose mastery, were the hallmarks of this work and the greater number of his volumes to follow.

In the meanwhile (in 1890) Hudson had made the acquaintance of the writer R.B. Cunningham Graham, who had sought out Hudson after reading a review article of his on the Argentinean Pampas, the subject of some of Graham's own work. Graham's interest could only have encouraged Hudson in getting further material on South America together, and Idle Days in Patagonia, one of his best non-fiction books, was published in 1893. Birds in a Village (later revised as Birds in Town and Village, 1919) appeared the same year. With these two books Hudson shaped for himself a literary form of great flexibility which he would follow in the greater part of his future output, i.e. in Nature in Downland (1900), Birds and Man (1901; revised in 1915), Hampshire Days (1903), The Land's End (1908), Afoot in

England (1909), A Shepherd's Life (1910), Adventures Among Birds (1913), The Book of a Naturalist (1919), A Traveller in Little Things (1921) and A Hind in Richmond Park (1922). These books were personal essays, or sequences of essays, generally centred upon nature but including human beings as 'figures in a landscape', and involving experiences, impressions, observations, reflections and anecdotes. The materials are united either by a particular place (Cornwall in The Land's End; or Hampshire in Hampshire Days), or a particular theme (birds, for example, or the life of a shepherd on the Wiltshire Downs). Some of the volumes are constructed to make a well-knit harmonious whole, as in A Shepherd's Life, while others are comprised of a diversity of materials only loosely strung together, as in The Book of a Naturalist and A Traveller in Little Things.

Between Birds in a Village and Nature in Downland, Hudson published British Birds (1895), which Tomalin brusquely but appropriately describes as a 'hack text-book', followed by Birds in London in 1898, which as she says, is a better book, yet still 'a somewhat pathetic document in contrast with the grand scope of his South American work'.<sup>45</sup>

Hudson was an active member of the Society for the Protection of Birds, being from 1891 onwards a member of its council; and for the Society he wrote a number of pamphlets on birds, often drawing attention to the slaughter of birds (and endangerment of species) by collectors, sportsmen, and traffickers in plumage as decoration for women's hats (Hudson violently detested women who sported such headgear, referring to them acidly as 'feathered women'); and this theme - together with cruelty to birds in its various forms - is taken up in many of his books as well.

In 1898 Hudson was elected a Fellow of the Zoological Society of London; and in 1900 he finally took out British citizenship. The year after his becoming a citizen, admirers of Hudson's writing secured for him a Civil

List Pension amounting to £150 a year, helping to alleviate his financial difficulties. (Characteristic of Hudson's rather thorny attitude of independence, as well as his sense of moral scruples, he resigned the pension in 1920, when sales of his books had made this possible.)

In 1901 Hudson made the acquaintance of the critic Edward Garnett, who was at that time a reader in the publishing-house to which Hudson had submitted El Ombú. Garnett writes:

I went up to Hudson and told him that he had written a masterpiece. Its grave beauty, its tragic sweetness, indeed, had swept me off my feet, as it does now when I read [it].

Hudson's reaction was characteristic; he 'glared at me astonished, as though he wished to annihilate me....'<sup>46</sup> Garnett became both a good friend and an ardent champion of Hudson's work; he also introduced Hudson to other writers of the day, including Conrad, Ford, W.H. Davies, Edward Thomas, and Walter de la Mare. Hudson became particularly fond of Edward Thomas; in fact, he said that Thomas was the person he had most loved in his life, and he was grief-stricken when Thomas was killed in the First World War. As Hudson is often considered to have been a cold, unemotional and passionless man, it is worth reproducing here Mrs. Helen Thomas' recollection of a meeting between Hudson and herself, shortly before Hudson's death:

I found him there [at Whiteley's, where they were to have lunch] - a tall gaunt eagle-eyed man who talked only about Edward. He was in tears all the time and said, "I can't get over his loss. He was as dear to me as if he had been my son. I never had a son, but he, I felt, was the son I would have liked to have, and I loved him. I have no one else, all my love was for him." He could not speak for weeping. I was too deeply moved to speak. He then asked about my circumstances and said that he had heard they were difficult for me. He said, "I have first editions of all my books and these are of some value. I will send them to you." And so we talked for about an hour and he said, "I should have met you before. It would have been good to talk to you. I am a very ill man and I have not long to live. We shall not meet again." 47

Green Mansions, which Hudson had written over a very long period of time, was published in 1904; the publication of a new edition of this book

in the U.S.A. twelve years later, with an enthusiastic introduction by John Galsworthy, was greeted with unexpected and great popular success. As Denis Shruballs says:

It sold extremely well; and so for the first time Hudson - now 75 years of age - was able to enjoy not merely literary, but also a measure of financial success. 48

Emily Hudson had been seriously ill from the summer of 1911 onwards, and by March of 1913 she was a permanent invalid. From August 1914 to her death on March 19, 1921, she lived, first with a companion and later with a nurse, in Worthing and later West Tarring. For reasons of his own health, Hudson had to live apart from her; but he wrote to her constantly as well as visiting her.

In the winter of 1915-16 he suffered a long illness in Cornwall, after catching a chill. The illness, however - in Ruth Tomalin's words -

brought him a strange and radiant experience. He had been reading Serge Aksakoff's History of My Childhood; and this, combined with his weak state, and with the sound of the winter storm outside the window, seemed to lull him into a kind of waking trance in which he relived his childhood, feeling himself thousands of miles away in the sun and wind of the pampas. Pencil in hand, he began at once to write down some of these revelations; and this story, which he called Far Away and Long Ago, grew into an achievement complete and perfect in its visionary quality and lucid simplicity of writing. 49

Hudson had, in fact, drafted a first chapter of this autobiographical work, recounting his early years in Argentina, as far back as 1886; the visionary experience brought on by his illness gave him the power to resume the project afresh. The book was published in 1918, and met with very considerable praise from reviewers.

Hudson's health, owing to his life-long heart trouble and his advanced age, was precarious in these last years; but he kept writing until the very finish, dying (on August 18, 1921) just before he had been able to complete the final chapter of A Hind in Richmond Park, a purposefully discursive meditation on the nature of the senses. (The materials of this chapter were put together after his death by Morley Roberts.) His friends had inscribed

on his grave: 'He loved birds and green places, and the wind on the heath, and saw the brightness of the skirts of God.'

3

The contemporary French poet Philippe Jaccottet writes:

Without ever being very much aware of it, I have always had something like a pair of scales in my mind. On the one side were pain, death, on the other, the beauty of life. The first side always bore a heavier load, the second almost nothing but the unweighable. But I would sometimes think that the unweighable could perhaps tip the balance. (...) I believed, I wanted to believe once, because I was young then and unaware and had no idea what death is (although I continually, immodestly, foolishly spoke of it), that if you forced yourself to keep your gaze fixed upon those moments of brightness which seem, initially, to point to another world, you would inevitably manage to approach such a world, painlessly and without disruption; since I have seen death a little closer to hand, I no longer believe this. But does the horror of death have to contaminate the whole span of life, to triumph and leave nothing standing? I sometimes tell myself: beauty is as unintelligible as suffering, therefore as real, therefore equally strong and inevitable. The body would be like someone holding a lamp. The lamp must not stop burning because the one who carries it tires, is worn down, collapses. 50

What is striking here, is the articulation of a vision of things, which is very much at the heart of W.H. Hudson's work. Like Jaccottet, Hudson was concerned to make manifest in his writing those 'primary oppositions, the "great adversaries which have always inhabited our mythologies"'.<sup>51</sup>

Epiphanic vision is basic in Hudson, as in Philippe Jaccottet; and we must speak of two main kinds of epiphany: the 'affirmative' epiphany which affirms the earthly by intuiting the divine through or within it; and 'negative' epiphany which negates the earthly by opening up a yawning, dizzying chasm beneath us, an abyss of affliction, darkness, evil, or oblivion. In Jaccottet the 'negative' epiphany is mostly seen as suffering and extinction; against a paradisiacal beauty which is manifested, in Through an Orchard, through the image of an almond tree in blossom:

All that needs to be imagined is the ordinary man, frail bearer of sight, a beast soon broken down, the man whose eye has some analogy with the sky he scans, constantly liable to be crushed by the slightest thing, the fleshy being, bearing the burden of his flesh, the being who has remained essentially mysterious - imagine this man passing, wearying, departing; he sees these hailstones momentarily lingering in the branches, confuses snow with blossoms, sees snow driving out another sort of snow or following upon it - and he thinks: 'White birds are the messengers of the gods.' 52

Jaccottet's example can be placed here, at the very beginning of this examination of W.H. Hudson's work, as an embodiment of the primary meanings to be found in Hudson. Something of the contemporary relevance of Hudson's much-neglected oeuvre can be taken, indeed, as residing in such a close resemblance in vision to Jaccottet, one of France's most important contemporary writers.<sup>53</sup>

By looking at Jaccottet, we can yield - through an excellent essay by Mark Treharne - further insights which can be transferred to Hudson and the type of significance to be found in his writings.

Treharne writes:

Philippe Jaccottet's poetry traces the patterns of his attentiveness to the visible world with meticulous verbal skill, recreating the phenomena of landscape and place with vivid effects of presence and familiarity. Yet his is not merely a descriptive poetic. Equally close to his concerns is a sense of the unfamiliar, the elusive and remote which he calls 'the All-other', 'the limitless'.... These two poles of his poetry interact intimately and unassumingly: the limitless is sought and intuited through the limited, the humble things of the natural world. His work records and enacts these intuitions in 'epiphanies' occasioned by phenomena of landscape.... These epiphanies are moments when 'the world... is not an anchor' (as he puts it in Paysages avec figures absentes) and they are almost invariably associated with images of luminosity, buoyancy, air, and 'clarity'. It has been pointed out that Jaccottet's intuitions of landscape and his intense encounters with the objects of the natural world bear a certain resemblance to Hopkins's 'inscape': this certainly helps to indicate the kind of scrupulous attention he pays to the visible world.... 54

He is at pains to point out that:

... there is nothing facile about Jaccottet's sense of clarity: it is achieved only through a fastidious choice of words and syntax, plotting the patient course (particularly in the prose writing) towards those elusive moments of epiphany, the 'sudden breaches', the possible 'glimpses of another world', possible because they are ultimately ungraspable. The long absorption in the visible world that results in

the apprehension of something invisible is characterised by a particular kind of self-effacement: 'self-absorption increases the opacity of life' writes Jaccottet at the beginning of La Semaïson.... This theme is a recurrent one and some lines of Simone Weil... quoted in Jaccottet's poetic journal, shed further light upon the quality of an absorption beyond self: 'Whenever we are really attentive, we destroy some of the evil in ourselves.... Attentiveness consists in suspending one's thought, leaving it free, empty, so that the object can penetrate through it...' (...) The vividly evoked encounter with visible phenomena is a characteristic point of departure in his writing, and if the elements of landscape can become 'laden with the limitless' they are at the same time palpably present and he evokes them initially with scrupulous attention to concrete detail. Any metaphorical or symbolic significance in this poetry, as the quality of Jaccottet's attentiveness might lead us to expect, must never be imposed or decorative; he makes this clear in a remark about 'realism' in modern poetry as '... not simply a meticulous inventory of the visible, but an attention to it so profound that it must inevitably end by coming up against the limits of the visible' (L'Entretien des Muses). 55

This attention, scrupulous in its probity and in its radical openness (which is to say, its suspension of the conclusions of conceptual fore-knowledge that would impose upon the phenomena at hand the judgements of a pre-existing framework of values and ideas and prejudices), is the foundation of Hudson's writings. The attention is to natural details (at least, when it is not to existential details), as in Jaccottet; but, again like Jaccottet, these details yield an invisible, suprasensible pattern, meaning, or sense which corresponds to a symbolic dimension. This symbolic dimension or significance is disclosed in epiphanic vision; in the 'special moment' born of attention which Ezra Pound speaks of with regard to Hudson, comparing such a moment with the moment of awareness which is at the root of the Japanese haiku: '... thus his trees [are] like images of trees in black stone.'<sup>56</sup> Guy Davenport also points towards this symbolic dimension when he writes of how various nineteenth century writers (and twentieth century writers, he could have added) had, in their attention to natural details, an intuition of ultimate authenticities. Thoreau's love affair with the scrub-oak, homeliest of trees, began to have the qualities of myth, the Greek feeling for the olive we find in Oedipus at Colonus. 57

In the sense that what I am calling here a symbolic dimension or



significance is disclosed in attention to details of the sensible order, rather than consciously superimposed upon these details, a symbol is not 'an entity that merely stands for and points to something other than itself, like a hieroglyph', but rather something which 'brings us into connection with a transcendent reality by participating in the power and the being of that reality.'<sup>58</sup> A particular form of attention to things - one of 'radical openness' - may reveal these things in a different light than that habitual light which may be assumed 'natural', 'normal' or even 'objective'. The way that things are revealed to us - their modality of being - is pre-structured by cultural 'horizons' of understanding, i.e. assumptions about the nature of reality which form a frame through which we view things.<sup>59</sup> The way ontological modalities are articulated - brought to speech or expression - as meanings, is indicated succinctly by Elémire Zolla; he writes,

There is no such thing as an event in itself; death itself can 'be' a passage to real life and an occasion for rejoicing, or a crude, irredeemable, despairing destruction; pain can 'be' an eagerly coveted badge of honour, or a spicing for lust, or a means of transcending fear and worldliness, or else just distressing waste and horror. 60

Meaning has been called the 'as-structure' - that by which we see something as something (rather than something else) - and that thing in question takes on a different sort of reality (i.e. it appears in a different way) depending on this articulation.<sup>61</sup> To further show what is meant by this, we can see that the world can be seen as a totality of objective facts opposed to a knowing subject; as a realm haunted by numinous forces; as a micro-cosmic order, created by God, corresponding to a macrocosmic order of divine forms or archetypes which can be intuited through the details of that microcosmic order; as a vale of tears; as a realm of mere fleeting appearances, of an unreal quality; as a flux of dynamic interactions between several fundamental, 'cosmic' elements; as a bridge to another, better world; as an abortive creation of an evil, fallen or inferior supernatural

being (e.g. a Demiurge); as an arena for acting out dominations and submissions, for realizing desires or having them frustrated, for receiving pleasure and avoiding pain; and so on. These modes are not all mutually exclusive; but in these examples, nevertheless, we see different ways in which reality appears.

The philosopher Philip Wheelwright, in his book The Burning Fountain, presents a valuable elucidation of what is meant by ontological modalities and their semantic articulation:

Let ontology be understood to mean the study of the major ways in which anything can be said to really be. When Jesus speaks of our Father in Heaven, or when Prometheus in Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound denounces the tyranny of Zeus, in each case something is being spoken about. Neither Jesus nor Aeschylus is merely vaporizing; each of them has a certain beliefful attitude toward that which he is characterizing. On the other hand, neither of them is speaking about that Something Other in literal everyday terms. Jesus does not mean that God is a father in quite the same sense as an earthly father; Aeschylus does not mean that God is a tyrant in quite the same sense as an earthly monarch might be. Both are employing the language of analogy - or, in the most adequate sense of the phrase, the language of poetic vision. Each is speaking about something which he regards as very real, but of a different order of being from that of common familiarity. And we, as readers and hearers, if we want to understand such teachers instead of imposing our own conceptualizations upon them, must try to find our way back into their ontological perspective - into that way of confronting the world and asking questions about it which is the realizing medium of their mode of thought and utterance - i.e., the medium through which and in terms of which the object spoken about is real. The discipline of grasping such a viewpoint, of effecting such a translation of basic intellectual reliance, is an ontological discipline - a discipline with respect to the way in which Being is grasped and interpreted.

Now ontology is closely involved with semantics - which is to say, with the study of meanings and of how they can be expressed and communicated. Being, in its various modes, has to be articulated in language.... 62

It now becomes more possible to understand what is involved in the work of a writer like Hudson (or like Philippe Jaccottet). For, it is precisely the intervention (between the writing and the reader) of a form of pre-understanding of what reality is and how literature relates to it, which obscures the meaning and significance of a writer like Hudson - and removes him to the margins of our literature. The definition of art which is the

basis for this account of Hudson's work is: the concrete and coherent embodiment, disclosure or making-manifest of hidden or invisible modalities of being, in terms of a sensuous medium.<sup>63</sup> The meaning of this will have to be made clearer through a detailed examination of Hudson's writing. But it may be as well to add that the reason for speaking of 'modalities of being', rather than of subjective and objective modes of experience and expression, is because of the way that, within the subject-object schema upon which this form of identification depends, a number of pre-conceptions structure our understanding in advance: chiefly, the schizomorphic opposition of rational and irrational (objective and subjective), as if all understanding, and all modes of being, could be tidily subsumed under those two categories; the homocentric foundation, whereby everything is referred to the human existent for its identity and value (whether the 'thing' is a tree, or God); the inherent wilfulness whereby all 'things', all forms of being, are rendered as objects for a subject, whether that subject is the rational ego which calculates and manipulates beings for 'human ends', or the irrational side of the human existent which relates to other beings in terms of its own desires and drives. Against this, we can place the abnegation of a wilful knowledge of other beings that subjugates them to its own ends; of the initiative in claiming beings and giving them definition and 'meaning'; and of domination and possession of beings. This abnegation makes way for a receptiveness, an openness; so that phenomena can appear in terms of an ontological 'fullness' which can be contained and focused only in a symbolic form (whether as myth, religious symbolism, dream, or art). Within this relation to other beings, the human existent experiences itself, also, in terms of a like 'fullness', which can be understood as a more 'selfless' mode of personal being (in its transcendence of the 'subjective' and 'objective' claims of the self). It is here that we can begin to understand a

perspective upon things which, attending to natural particulars, opens upon a supernatural, spiritual, or mythopoeic dimension. This is the case with Hudson's epiphanic vision; and in order to do Hudson justice, it is important that we do not close it off in advance by rendering it as a mere fantastic elaboration of empirical categories (or a superimposition of fantastic categories upon empirical ones). If we accept such a reduction as a starting-point, we have already set up an empiricist perspective (using 'empiricist' in the strict, philosophical sense) upon reality as constituting reality itself; to which can be opposed 'fantastic' (i.e. unreal) categories, or 'figurative' ones (where we are pointing to certain empirically real things through a mode of expression which is decorative and aesthetically pleasing, but which in no way participates in any reality that transcends the realm of empirical 'fact').

This dimension of Hudson's work can be called spiritual, or supernatural, or mythopoeic, with good reason. The principal 'archetype' operative in Hudson's work is the Earthly (or Natural) Paradise; which perdures, but as something elusive and threatened. By archetype, I don't refer to a psychic image (or images) issuing from some 'collective unconscious' (as Jung defined 'archetype'), but rather paradigmatic or perennial hierophanic forms or images (as Mircea Eliade has defined 'archetype' - hierophany signifying anything which is a vehicle for the disclosure of the transcendently 'Other' or divine). Philip Wheelwright conveniently describes the mythic or mythopoeic as 'the archetypal in action', involving events of an archetypal form and/or 'actors' - personages - of archetypal dimensions (e.g. God, Satan, Zeus, Hermes, The Hero, The Fool, etc.).<sup>64</sup> Of this perdurance of the archetypal, Eliade has written that:

... man, whatever else he may be free of, is forever the prisoner of his own archetypal intuitions, formed at the moment when he first perceived his position in the cosmos. The longing for Paradise can be traced even in the most banal actions of the modern man. Man's concept

of the absolute can never be completely uprooted: it can only be debased. And primitive spirituality lives on in its own way not in action, not as a thing man can effectively accomplish, but as a nostalgia which creates things that become values in themselves: art, the sciences, social theory, and all the other things to which men will give the whole of themselves. 65

W.H. Hudson lived through a time in which the supernatural basis of the human 'soul' - the person - along with a conception of nature which in some way co-responds, co-incides or participates in a supernatural perspective, were being assailed in a particularly forceful way by rationalistic and mechanistic ideologies (particularly through the enormous impact of Darwinian ideas).<sup>66</sup> The epiphanic and archetypal in Hudson perdures against the grain of rationalistic certainty (we could even say, in spite of it); but it perdures as something elusive and even, as often seems the case, fractured or residual, yet still, strangely, insistent. And if this is true, the 'affirmative' epiphany proves elusive in a more fundamental sense, because this revelation of beauty, wholeness, harmony and plenitude is threatened by evil - involving, among other things, cruelty, violence and destruction.<sup>67</sup>

The full symbolic force of Hudson's work can be felt most completely in his fiction; but the fiction has fairly consistently had to take a 'back-seat' to his non-fiction - despite the enormous popularity during the last years of his life of the novel Green Mansions and the high esteem in which his contemporaries held his fiction. In the following chapters I will show how Hudson's epiphanic vision is at the basis of both the fiction and the non-fiction.

NOTES

1. A.C. Ward, Illustrated History of English Literature, Vol 3: Blake to Shaw; London, 1968, p. 286.
2. A.C. Ward, Twentieth-Century English Literature: 1901-1960; London, 1964, pp. 218, 216.
3. Samuel C. Chew and Richard D. Altick, The Nineteenth Century and After (Vol. IV of A Literary History of England, ed. Albert Baugh), 2nd. ed.; London, 1967, p. 1595.
4. Ford Madox Ford, Mightier Than the Sword; London, 1938, pp. 72-73.
5. Ford Madox Ford, Joseph Conrad: A Personal Remembrance; Boston, 1924, p. 210.
6. Ford Madox Ford, op. cit., p. 73.
7. Ibid, p. 70.
8. Ibid, p. 67.
9. Ibid, pp. 67, 68.
10. Ernest Rhys, Introduction to Hudson's A Shepherd's Life; London, 1936, p. ix.
11. John Galsworthy, Introduction to Hudson's Far Away and Long Ago; London, 1967, pp. v, viii. (Galsworthy's Introduction was first published in the 1939 edition.) Hereafter abbreviated as FALA.
12. Ibid, pp. v, vi, ix.
13. Edward Garnett, 'A Note on Hudson's Spirit', published as a Preface to Hudson's A Traveller in Little Things; London, 1921, pp. ix-x. Hereafter abbreviated as TLT.
14. Ezra Pound, Selected Prose 1909-1965, ed. William Cookson; London, 1973, p. 399. Pound's essay on Hudson - 'Hudson: Poet Strayed into Science' - was originally published in The Little Review, May-June 1920.
15. Ibid, p. 399.
16. Quoted by Ruth Tomalin, W.H. Hudson; London, 1954, p. 99.
17. George Woodcock, Herbert Read: The Stream and the Source; London, 1972, p. 72.
18. David Garnett, Great Friends; London, 1979, p. 24.
19. Robert Hamilton, W.H. Hudson: The Vision of Earth; London, 1946, pp. ix, 141.

20. Ruth Tomalin, Introduction to Hudson's South American Romances [i.e. The Purple Land, Green Mansions, El Ombu]; London, 1966, p. xviii.
21. Hudson, Men, Books and Birds (Letters to Morley Roberts); London, 1925, p. 293. (Letter of April 1, 1921.) Hereafter abbreviated as MBB.
22. For Hudson's attitude towards his writing and the biographical context for this, see above, pp. 13-15.
23. The question of the supernatural or spiritual dimensions of experience will be explored in Part One.
24. For the concept of modalities of being, see section 3.
25. 'The meaning of a text,' asserts the contemporary philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, 'surpasses its author not occasionally, but always.' (Quoted by David E. Linge in the Introduction to Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics, ed. Linge; Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1977, p. xxv.) It is the transcendence of biographical and psychological details (and the transcendence of those factors which provide the personality with 'objective' ambience or context) which robs those details of any profound or radical force or value.
26. This section is largely based on Ruth Tomalin's W.H. Hudson and Denis Shruballs's W.H. Hudson: Writer and Naturalist (Tisbury, Wiltshire, 1977). Tomalin's recent W.H. Hudson: A Biography (London, 1982) is a larger, more extensively researched version of her original book, and is the most valuable of all the biographies, because it is the most detailed and because Tomalin has a deeper, more sensitive understanding of Hudson's achievement than Shruballs.
27. Three strains united in him: English, Irish, and American. His parental grandfather was a Devon man: his maternal grandmother was Irish. But his father and mother were both American born, his mother with American blood and tradition.  
(Robert Hamilton, W.H. Hudson: The Vision of Earth, p. 39.)
28. It is difficult to establish parts of Hudson's chronology exactly; his own evidence (in FALA) is sometimes misleading as to dates.
29. We do know, however, that he continued in his writing of papers for the Society.
30. The article under a female pseudonym was entitled 'Wanted - a Lullaby', by 'Maude Merryweather', published in Cassell's Family Magazine (March 1875). See Ruth Tomalin, W.H. Hudson: A Biography, p. 112.
31. Emily's age is established by Ruth Tomalin, ibid, p. 115. There was also a great difference between them in physical height, Emily being less than five feet, and Hudson six feet three inches.
32. The letter to Violet Hunt (of April 4, 1921) is reproduced in William Henry Hudson: A Tribute by Various Writers, ed. Samuel J. Looker; Worthing, Sussex, 1947, p. 117. Evidence has recently come to light, through Ruth Tomalin's research, that if Hudson was not in love with his wife, he did fall in love with Linda Gardiner in 1901, and remain in love with her until his death. See Tomalin, ibid, pp. 189-92.

33. Morley Roberts, W.H. Hudson: A Portrait; London, 1924, p. 36.
34. Ibid, p. 52.
35. Ruth Tomalin, Introduction to Hudson's South American Romances, p. xiii.
36. He says, for example, to Edward Garnett in a letter of 1917: '... I'm no literary man...'; and in 1918, he writes to Garnett:
- I didn't want you to write in praise of FALA ; I should have preferred dispraise or at all events criticism.... As to its being a 'masterpiece', that's all your fun.
- (Letters from W.H. Hudson to Edward Garnett; London, 1925, pp. 177, 184. Hereafter abbreviated as LWHH. An earlier edition of Hudson's letters to Garnett was published in 1923 as 153 Letters from W.H. Hudson.)
37. Ford Madox Ford, Mightier Than the Sword, p. 65.
38. Ibid, p. 74.
39. David Garnett, Great Friends, pp. 30, 32.
40. The Society was a consuming interest with Hudson.
41. David Garnett, op. cit., pp. 32, 33.
42. Ruth Tomalin, W.H. Hudson, p. 101.
43. MBB, p. 272. (Letter of Oct. 26, 1920.)
44. Edward Garnett, 'A Note on Hudson's Spirit', pp. xi-xii. The Wallace quotation is cited by Garnett.
45. Ruth Tomalin, W.H. Hudson, p. 106. David Garnett (Great Friends, p. 30) comments that British Birds 'is a bad book because he deliberately omitted some of our rare visitors lest collectors should be put on the watch for them'.
46. Edward Garnett, Introduction to LWHH, p. 1.
47. Quoted in Ruth Tomalin, W.H. Hudson, p. 139, from an unidentified source (presumably a private letter from Mrs. Thomas). For a briefer account of this meeting, see Helen Thomas, Time & Again: memoirs and letters, ed. Myfanwy Thomas; Manchester, 1978, p. 108.
48. Denis Shruballs, W.H. Hudson: Writer and Naturalist, p. 64.
49. Ruth Tomalin, W.H. Hudson, p. 131.
50. Philippe Jaccottet, Through an Orchard [À travers un verger], tr. Mark Treharne; Portree, Isle of Skye, 1978, pp. 16, 23-24.
51. Ibid, p. 36. (Treharne, 'A Note on the Poetry of Philippe Jaccottet'; quoting Jaccottet.)
52. Ibid, p. 30.



53. For Jaccottet, see the Introduction by Cid Corman to his translations of Jaccottet's poetry: Breathings; Tokyo and New York, 1974.
54. Mark Treharne, 'A Note on the Poetry of Philippe Jaccottet', pp. 35-36.
55. Ibid, pp. 38-39, 41.
56. Ezra Pound, Selected Prose 1909-1965, p. 402.
57. Guy Davenport, The Geography of the Imagination: Forty Essays; San Francisco, 1981, p. 242.
58. Albert Hofstadter, Agony and Epitaph: Man, his art, and his poetry; New York, 1970, p. xii.
59. The use here of the term 'horizons' follows that of Hans-Georg Gadamer in his 'philosophical hermeneutics'. See David E. Linge's Introduction to Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics, pp. xiv-xv, xix-xxi, xxviii-xxix.
60. Elémire Zolla, Archetypes; London, 1981, p. 50.
61. The concept of the 'as-structure' is Martin Heidegger's. See Richard E. Palmer, 'The Postmodernity of Heidegger', BOUNDARY 2, Vol. IV No. 2, Winter 1976, pp. 416-18.
62. Philip Wheelwright, The Burning Fountain: A Study in the Language of Symbolism (rev. ed.); Bloomington, Indiana, 1968, pp. 5-6.
63. This definition is very much in the debt of Mircea Eliade's writings. See, for example, his book Images and Symbols (tr. Philip Mairet; London, 1961, p. 12):
- The symbol reveals certain aspects of reality... which defy any other means of knowledge. Images, symbols and myths are not irresponsible creations of the psyche; they... fulfill a function, that of bringing to light the most hidden modalities of being.
64. Philip Wheelwright, op. cit., p. 149.
65. Mircea Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religion; London, 1976, p. 433.
66. For the question of evolutionary theory in relation to religious issues, see Ian G. Barbour, Issues in Science and Religion, London, 1966 (especially Chapter Four, 'Biology and Theology in the Nineteenth Century'). Robert Lee Wolff's Gains and Losses: Novels of Doubt and Faith in Victorian England, London, 1977, is valuable for the overview it provides of the impact of evolutionism on Victorian fiction (see, particularly, Chapter Eight, 'The Impact of Science'). See also Gillian Beer, Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot, and Nineteenth-Century Fiction; London, 1983.
67. Hudson's ethical position regarding violence is not without ambivalence. In Part Two (Chapter Three) I will remark on the ambivalence of Hudson's attitude to violence in The Purple Land; that is, on the one hand, he assimilates violence to the 'free', 'colourful', vital life of

the Banda Orientál, and on the other, he denounces - through the words of his hero Richard Lamb - the excesses of bloodshed, at the political level, which give the country its appellation, 'the purple land'. An equivocation can also be pointed out between a passage in FALA (pp. 107-08), where he comments:

Darwin, writing in praise of the gaucho in his Voyage of a Naturalist, says that if a gaucho cuts your throat he does it like a gentleman: even as a small boy I knew better - that he did his business rather like a hellish creature revelling in his cruelty.

- and his remark to Cunninghame Graham, in a letter of March 21, 1897:

As to the Banda Orientál, I am extremely pleased to know that there still exists one nation of the globe that will not have 'peace at any price'. The more good old-fashioned throat cutting there is in the Banda the better I shall like it.

(W.H. Hudson's Letters to R.B. Cunninghame Graham; London, 1941, p. 39.)  
But on the whole, what we find - especially in books like Green Mansions, El Ombú, and Dead Man's Plack and An Old Thorn - is compassion towards the victims of violence, and a negative attitude towards those who employ that violence.

PART ONEChapter One

I am concerned, first of all, with delineating Hudson's understanding of nature, and existence in general. How does Hudson approach existence? What is the foundation or basis of his perceptual and interpretative awareness? In what ways does existence appear in Hudson's writings? These are some of the issues I will be attempting to deal with. Specifically, I will be fastening upon the notion of attention, in relation to an 'open', engaged, empathetic or participative mode of understanding. Attention occurs from a given, finite standpoint, involving a particularised horizon; and it is directed towards an understanding of existence in terms of its various modalities of being. This is not a simple procedure where the beings and things of existence - whatever they may be - are revealed totally, transparently, within an act of knowing: rather there are always layers, depths, degrees, shifting perspectives of illumination, and the process of understanding is an open-ended response to an essentially mysterious alterity. Beyond this, I will argue, in due course, that Hudson's reading of natural and existential details is ultimately directed towards the disclosure of the spiritual or supernatural. On the whole, I will be basing my account, in this Part, on Hudson's non-fictional works. This is to minimize serious overlaps between Parts and, more importantly, to present a case for the symbolic aspects of Hudson's vision in terms of the non-fiction - where they are less obvious - before pursuing the matter further with the fiction.

Attention to 'the otherness of the visible', in Hugh Kenner's phrase, at least so far as that attention makes its appearance in literature as natural description, was largely developed in the nineteenth century, and

appears at its most impressive in writers like Ruskin, Hopkins (especially, in his journals), Hudson.<sup>1</sup>

Samuel J. Looker has written:

We might apply to Hudson Ruskin's apophthegm, to be found in Modern Painters. 'The greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to see something, and to tell what it saw in a plain way.'<sup>2</sup>

This conception of attending to things as extremely important, rests ultimately, in Hudson as in Ruskin, upon a supernatural or spiritual notion of things which can also be found, for example, in the Romantics and the American Transcendentalists. But it can also be found in a natural scientist like Louis Agassiz, who 'called himself the librarian of the works of God', and whose attention to physical facts is so intensive, so unrelenting in its feeling for the importance - Agassiz would have said the sacredness - of those facts, that he could 'sustain for fifty pages a lucid description of the inside of an egg'.<sup>3</sup> Hudson was impatient with a purely visual attention, or response, to the details of existence; but the degree to which his own attention is centred upon the act of seeing will be obvious from his descriptive passages.

At its most mundane, Hudson's writing will often focus upon a quality of experience in which the appearance of a thing has the force of a genuine vividness and freshness. Consider, for example, the following passage from Nature in Downland:

I was so fortunate as to have a seat near the middle of the church, abreast of the side door which stood wide open admitting the summer light and warmth and outdoor sounds; so that while following the service I could let my eyes rest on the landscape. That was a beautiful picture I had to look at, with the doorway for frame; a round yellow hill and the blue sky beyond, and between the hill and the church a green meadow, low outhouse and fences, and a small paddock or enclosure with rooks and daws and small birds coming and going. And by and by, into that green enclosure came a white calf, and remained there for some time, standing motionless, in the centre of the picture. The brilliant sunlight made it luminous, and it was like a calf hewn out of a block of purest white chalk.<sup>4</sup>

The simplicity with which Hudson can convey this quality of experience is

disarming; and certainly no less beautiful for its simplicity. In The Book of a Naturalist, Hudson wrote:

The first sight of a thing, the shock of emotion, the vivid and ineffaceable image registered in the brain, is worth more than all the knowledge acquired by reading.... 5

Hudson's emphasis on the shock of first seeing a thing, and, elsewhere, on the importance of first impressions and of not seeing things too clearly (i.e. in the manner of 'objective' examination), shouldn't however blind us to the patience involved, for the most part, in attuning oneself to the things being observed - really observing, really attending to the phenomena at hand, as Hudson attended to them.<sup>6</sup> Vigilance and absorption were what was required for this activity. In its most intense moments, this experience of phenomena has the force of revelation; it is - that is to say - epiphanic. This essentially visionary quality has been remarked by various writers on Hudson; for example, W.J. Keith says,

If we are incapable of connecting observation and vision, if 'seeing' is no more to us than an automatic reflex action of the eye, then we shall never succeed in understanding Hudson. 7

The form of concern for things involved in Hudson's writings is tied to an attitude of fundamental reverence towards life, and the being of the living thing - a being which is not to be equated with the natural object (known through dissection and objective analysis):

One of my sweetest-tempered and most benevolent friends, who loves, he imagines, all things both great and small, pays the children of his village sixpence for every dead adder or grass-snake they bring him.... It is to be hoped that no such lover of God's creatures, including His 'wild wormes in woods', will take advantage of these hints [for finding adders]. Let him that finds an adder treat it properly, not without reverence, and his finding it will be to his gain in knowledge of that rare and personal kind which cannot be written or imparted in any way. That which we seek is not the viper, the subject of Fontana's monumental work, the little rope of clay or dead flesh in the British Museum, coiled in its bottle of spirits, and labelled 'Vipera berus, Linn!.

We seek the adder or nadder, that being venerated of old and generator of the sacred adder-stone of the Druids, and he dwells not in a jar of alcohol in the still shade and equable temperature of a museum. 8

Because it brings into sharper focus the nature of Hudson's attention to things - his engagement with them - I will quote him at some length on his concern for the living being. The passage in question is that part of The Book of a Naturalist where he deals with his reasons for not killing creatures; he begins by emphasizing the importance of being able to observe, to find out about and understand, the living as opposed to the lifeless thing:

... if we are seeking after knowledge, or something we call knowledge because it is a convenient word and can be made to cover many things it would be difficult to name, then to kill is no profit, but, on the contrary, a distinct loss. Fontana dissected 40,000 adders in his long and busy day, but if there is anything we want to know about the adder beyond the number of scales on the integument, and the number, shape, and size of the bones in the dead coil, he and the innumerable ophiologists and herpetologists who came after him are unable to tell us. We can read about the scales and bones in a thousand books. We want to know more about the living thing, even about its common life habits. 9

He goes on to state a further reason:

But a better reason for not killing may be given than this desire to discover a new fact - the mere satisfying of a mental curiosity. I know good naturalists who have come to hate the very sight of a gun, simply because that useful instrument has become associated in their case with the thought and the memory of the degrading or disturbing effect on the mind of killing the creatures we love, whose secrets we wish to find out. 10

Then, describing his feelings after once killing an adder, he contrasts these feelings with the concern for beings which is oriented towards a realization of 'the wonderfulness and eternal mystery of life itself'; and he does so in a passage which is of interest because of its intrinsic beauty, as well as for the way it reveals Hudson's most fundamental attitudes.

... I became conscious of a change in my mental attitude towards the living things that were so much to me, my chief happiness having always been in observing their ways. The curiosity was not diminished, but the feeling that had gone with it for a very long time was changed to what it had been when I was sportsman and collector, always killing things. The serpent gliding away before me was nothing but a worm with poison fangs in its head and a dangerous habit of striking at unwary legs - a creature to be crushed with the heel and no more thought about. I had lost something precious, not, I should say, in

any ethical sense, seeing that we are in a world where we must kill to live, but valuable in my special case, to me as a field-naturalist. Abstinence from killing had made me a better observer and a happier being, on account of the new or different feeling towards animal life which it had engendered. And what was this new feeling - wherein did it differ from the old of my shooting and collecting days, seeing that since childhood I had always had the same intense interest in all wild life? The power, beauty, and grace of the wild creature, its perfect harmony in nature, the exquisite correspondence between organism, form and faculties, and the environment, with the plasticity and intelligence for the readjustment of the vital machinery, daily, hourly, momentarily, to meet all changes in the conditions, all contingencies; and thus, amidst perpetual mutations and conflict with hostile and destructive forces, to perpetuate a form, a type, a species for thousands and millions of years! - all this was always present to my mind; yet even so it was but a lesser element in the complete feeling. The main thing was the wonderfulness and eternal mystery of life itself; this formative, informing energy - this flame that burns in and shines through the case, the habit, which in lighting another dies, and albeit dying yet endures for ever; and the kinship with it in all its appearances, in all organic shapes, however different from the human. Nay, the very fact that the forms were unhuman but served to heighten the interest; - the roe-deer, the leopard and the wild horse, the swallow cleaving the air, the butterfly toying with a flower, and the dragon-fly dreaming on the river; the monster whale, the silver slying-fish, and the nautilus with rose and purple tinted sails spread to the wind. 11

The sweep of Hudson's concern with diverse beings, the openness of his engagement with them, is as impressive as the quality of his attention to them. He touches upon this sweep, or range, in the passage above, when speaking of the 'unhuman' species, although it is only possible to appreciate the extent of this by tracing his concern through his various books, where he will write with passionate interest of the insect or the person, the rose or the puma. But we can see an indication of this by looking at some specific passages. In Nature in Downland he writes of a frustrated concern to enter more deeply, more completely, into the realm of insect-life:

It is sad to think... that in spite of all our prying into nature's secrets, all our progress and the vast accumulations of knowledge at our disposal, we do not and never can know what an insect knows or feel what it feels. What appearance this visible world has to an eye with twenty thousand facets to it is beyond our power to imagine or conceive. Nay, more, we know that these small [insect's] bodies have windows and avenues which ours are without; that they are conscious of vibrations which for us do not exist; that millions of 'nimble emanations', which miss us in spite of our large size, hit them. We

can gaze through a magnifying-glass at certain of their complex organs of sense, but cannot conjecture their use. They are as great a mystery or as meaningless to us as our most delicate and complicated scientific instruments would seem to a wild man of the woods. If it were not for our limitation - if we could go a little beyond our tether - we could find out the cause of the seemingly mad behaviour of the fly.

De Quincey wrote very prettily about what he called 'gluttonism' - the craving of the mind to know and enjoy all the good literature and music and art-work that had been produced; and finally to know the lives of all men - all who are living and all who had lived on the earth. It strikes one that this craving, as he described it, though he says that it afflicts us all, and that he himself had been reduced to an extremity of wretchedness by it, must be set down as one of the many inventions of that fascinating but insincere writer. Speaking for myself, if the power to attain all that De Quincey craved, or pretended that he craved for, were mine, I should give it all to be able to transform myself for the space of a summer's day into one of these little creatures on the South Downs; then to return to my own form and place in nature with a clear recollection of the wonderland in which I had been. And if, in the first place, I were permitted to select my own insect, I should carefully consider them all.... And after all I should make choice of the little blue butterfly, despite its smallness and frivolity, to house myself in.

The knowledge of that strange fairy world it inhabits would be incommunicable, like the vision vouchsafed to some religionist of which he has been forbidden to speak; but the memory of it would be a secret perennial joy. 12

In the same book he writes of human beings in such a way that we understand his concern to penetrate the unique world that a person inhabits, with its own fascination quite different from that of the 'alien', i.e. non-human, world of an insect. This interest in penetrating the world of another person is, however, without a desire to interrogate every psychological secret that person may harbour. He writes:

There are those, for instance, who are interested solely in the image, the semblance; who are not... concerned as to what is inside of a pretty head, but who look on living faces and forms as on carvings and sculptures in a gallery. Then, again, there are those who perpetually crave to get at the human heart in any human figure; who will go on pushing down or peeping behind screen after screen, and are never satisfied until they have seen behind the last screen of all. I class myself somewhere between the two extremes: not satisfied with the mere semblance or appearance of things, seeing men as trees and rocks, or as works of art, I am nevertheless not teased - 'tormented', De Quincey would have written - with that restless desire to pry into and minutely examine the secret colour and texture of the mind of every person I meet. 13

But if Hudson's concern is to be disassociated from both these attitudes, how then would we characterize it? An example of his description of human



beings will help here:

The tenant was a giant of a man with the hugest hands and immense long hairy arms like a gorilla, and a head that looked as if it had been roughly hewn out of some great black rock. Big and rough and dark, he looked almost dangerous, and I wondered how he had won that very gentle pretty woman to be his wife. But 'something had come into his heart,' perhaps, to alter his nature and make him in disposition like herself. He was like a good, preternaturally grave, child, and being inarticulate, he seldom opened his mouth. I remember one hot afternoon when we were at tea his sudden appearance in the doorway, and how, leaning on the doorframe looking in and down upon us, tired and black and dusty, his shirt-sleeves rolled up displaying his huge hairy arms, he seemed like some strange half-human monster who had just come up out of the interior of the earth, where he had been occupied blowing the bellows for Vulcan, or on some such huge grimy task. His wife cast a glance at him, and after a little while, and with just the faint suspicion of a smile playing about her mouth, she remarked, "Look at Old Blackie!" It was plain to any one who could read the feeling in the expression and the voice that she loved her rough giant. 14

Another example from the non-fictional writings may be useful in defining the nature of Hudson's feeling for other human beings. In his haunting sketch 'The Sapphire Gatherer' he writes of a woman encountered on one of his walks:

Going down to her I found she was old, with thin grey hair on an uncovered head, a lean dark face with regular features and grey eyes that were not old and looked steadily at mine, affecting me with a sudden mysterious sadness. For they were unsmiling eyes and themselves expressed an unutterable sadness, as it appeared to me at the first swift glance; or perhaps not that, as it presently seemed, but a shadowy something which sadness had left in them, when all pleasure and all interest in life forsook her, with all affections, and she no longer cherished either memories or hopes. This may be nothing but conjecture or fancy, but if she had been a visitor from another world she could not have been more strange to me. 15

But through this mystery, this barrier to psychological understanding, the encounter has revealed something of a different mode of being:

... the thought that came to me was that I was looking at and had been interviewing a being that was very like a ghost, or in any case a soul, a something which could not be described, like certain atmospheric effects in earth and water and sky which are ignored by the landscape painter. 16

This leads to a general comment about persons which discloses a good deal of Hudson's attitude:

Let me then take the case of the man who has trained his eyes, or

rather whose vision has unconsciously trained itself, to look at every face he meets, to find in most cases something, however little, of the person's inner life. Such a man could hardly walk the length of the Strand and Fleet Street or of Oxford Street without being startled at the sight of a face which haunts him with its tragedy, its mystery, the strange things it has half revealed. But it does not haunt him long; another arresting face follows, and then another, and the impressions all fade and vanish from the memory in a little while. But from time to time, at long intervals, once perhaps in a lustrum, he will encounter a face that will not cease to haunt him. 17

Hudson reserves his deepest depictions of personhood for his fiction, where the mysterious aspects of personal life - its most hidden modalities of being, in Eliade's phrase - can be represented through symbolic means (I am thinking mainly of Rima in Green Mansions), or, at any rate, with a further degree of tragic or poetic characterisation.<sup>18</sup> In characterising Hudson's engagement with persons, in general, I think we would have to speak of a basic respect for their personhood, an openness towards them which, in recognition of the qualities of that personhood, may deepen into reverence. It predicates the possibility of an encounter with such oddly 'touching' characters as 'Old Blackie' and his charming wife, equally with the possibility of encountering someone like the old samphire gatherer, someone whose face and being 'will not cease to haunt [you]'. The general absence in Hudson of that prying, that 'pushing down or peeping', into the secrets of the psychological self, is in itself an indication of fundamental respect; and it perhaps also indicates a belief that the most significant aspects of personal existence reveal themselves, to the person who remains open to their disclosure, rather than being pried out by the person who wilfully demands knowledge of whatever is secret, hidden.<sup>19</sup> (Hudson betrays a certain curiosity towards the motivations and situations of others, certainly; but this rarely becomes a form of that 'prying' referred to above.)

Having already mentioned one meaning of the concept of openness - as a prime characteristic of attention - in the sense of openness to different

sorts of beings, and having also, in the paragraph above, invoked an openness toward how a thing will appear (i.e. the way it will appear) to the attention, we can go on to indicate another meaning of the concept, that is, openness towards different sorts of experience. These meanings are, of course, related; for example, phenomena appear in certain ways within certain sorts of experience, and so openness towards experience will involve openness towards modes of appearance. Also, different sorts of phenomena appear within certain types of experience, so that openness towards experience will involve openness towards a diversity of phenomena. The latter is particularly relevant, for example, in relation to extrasensory experience; and it will show another aspect of openness in Hudson if we briefly consider this.<sup>20</sup>

Hudson considered 'super-normal phenomena', as he chose to refer to the details of extra-sensory experience, as belonging 'among other natural phenomena'.<sup>21</sup> Writing to Morley Roberts on the phenomenon of 'ghosts', Hudson said:

I think of them not as you do, as a part of the superstitious fabric as [disembodied] souls, survivals, entities, but as phenomena quite as interesting as gravitation, telepathy, and the Aurora Borealis.<sup>22</sup>

His insistence upon considering such phenomena as other examples of the natural allows us to distinguish them from the supernatural in the sense of that visionary dimension disclosed in the natural world through epiphanic experience.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, this does not mean that the supra-normal cannot also have a visionary dimension. What is at issue here, is simply Hudson's openness to extra-sensory phenomena - his willingness to accept that something occurs, which is not to be explained away in advance as a mere delusion, or something of no significance, but to be considered for what it shows us. In A Hind in Richmond Park, for example, he recounts the following experience:

One autumn evening some years ago I was walking home in a London street, walking briskly in the face of a strong south-west wind, the one I love best of all winds in this hemisphere, thinking of nothing except that I was thirsty for my tea and that the wind was very delightful, when something extraordinary occurred, something never hitherto experienced. This was the appearance of a face - the face of a girl well known and very dear to me, who lived at that time at home with her people at a distance of eighty miles from where I was. It was the face only, the vivid image of the face so vividly seen that it could not have appeared a more real human face if the girl had actually come before me. But, as I said, only the face, and it appeared to be in and a part of the wind since it did not rest still for one instant; but had a flutter like the flutter we used to see in a cinematograph picture, and continually moved to and fro and vanished and reappeared almost every second, always keeping on a level with and about three feet removed from my eyes. The flutter and motion generally was like that of a flag or of some filmy substance agitated by the wind. Then it vanished and I saw it no more. 24

Hudson has no wish to discount such an experience as telepathic communication; he speaks of such cases generally (and he concedes that they constitute 'but one aspect of the phenomenon of thought-transference') as involving

apparitions or phantasms of the living, the message or shock invariably proceeding from a person in a moment of supreme agitation and, frequently, in the agonies of death: the percipient as a rule being one closely connected with the sufferer by ties of relationship and affection. Furthermore, it is known or assumed that the sufferer is passionately thinking of the absent or loved one at the moment, and that the thought finds its objective over long distance, and appears as a wraith or phantasm. 25

It must be reiterated that the interest here, for my own purposes, is in Hudson's openness to a type of experience which would generally be discounted - closed off to interpretation and often to the possibility of experience itself, by mechanistic assumptions about the nature of existence - or else closed off to the understanding in terms of a precipitate fastening-upon of bogus metaphysical theories all-too-often found in the realms of occult literature. It is true, nonetheless, that Hudson rather too-readily tries to find a naturalistic explanation for the process involved in the experience - i.e. an explanation of how it could have happened in terms of the mind and the physical environment - but without closing off the reality of the experience itself. 26

This openness which I have been trying to delineate in Hudson's writing, as a prime characteristic of his fundamental mode of attention, can be stated at a general level as a freedom to experience and interpret things unrestricted by the sort of prior conceptual assumptions that reduce the elements of that experience and interpretation to mere objects of conventional knowledge. John T. Frederick states that the main direction of Hudson's life consisted in

the attainment of understanding beyond knowledge and the communication of it to others. 27

The sense in which Hudson's mode of understanding can be said to transcend the limitations of 'knowledge' will be dealt with below. The relation of openness to the way things appear within experience and understanding - i.e. how they appear or what they appear as - will be the major way in which the phenomenon of openness will concern us. But another aspect of openness that can be mentioned here is that of the structure of writing. John T. Frederick says of A Hind in Richmond Park: 'The book is... exploratory and concrete rather than dogmatic and abstract,' and although this is perhaps true of A Hind in especial degree, it is nevertheless true of Hudson in general.<sup>28</sup>

The structure tends to follow a course which is, in varying degree, open-ended, unmethodical, and in general free from preconceptions about the subject-matter. Haymaker states of the discursive quality of the writing:

After [Hudson] had learnt how to let his senses and mythical faculty do much of the writing for him, his problem became primarily that of a Crome or a Constable or a Cox: to give just enough design to the copiousness of nature so as to keep it held within a frame of art. 29

This structural openness follows on from Hudson's basic approach to his subject-matter; as Keith says,

At one extreme we find Gilbert White's systema naturae in which everything is neatly categorized, at the other the deliberately rambling essays of Hudson which hold the mirror up to an unsystematized nature. 30

## Chapter Two

We can explore Hudson's understanding of nature and existence further by looking at the emotional nature of his writing, and the way this is linked with his idea of a poetic understanding or presentation of things. Of course, in considering his concern or reverence for things, we have already glimpsed one side of this, which we might extend to speak of as a love or passion. Edward Thomas writes perceptively of Hudson:

In Mr. Hudson curiosity is a passion, or, rather, it is part of the greater passion of love. He loves what things are. That is to say, he loves life, not merely portions selected and detached by past generations of writers. 31

Edward Garnett also saw the emotional, passionate underpinning of Hudson's vision:

The very source and centre of Hudson's genius was the inner fire of passion lurking, of emotions of love and wrath and pity which broke through the observer's detachment when he branded man's brutality, and flashed forth from his eyes, in response to beauty, whether of nature or of woman, whether of birds or plants or trees or skies, or of their mother earth. 32

Hudson himself characterized his nature writings in terms of 'a more poetic and emotional treatment' of nature (than would be found in other naturalists, e.g. Gilbert White).<sup>33</sup> He writes:

We are bound as much as ever to facts; we seek for them more and more diligently, knowing that to break from them is to be carried away by vain imaginations. All the same, facts in themselves are nothing to us: they are important only in their relations to other facts and things - to all things, and the essence of things, material and spiritual. We are not like children gathering painted shells and pebbles on a beach; but, whether we know it or not, are seeking after something beyond and above knowledge. The wilderness in which we are sojourners is not our home; it is enough that its herbs and roots and wild fruits nourish and give us strength to go onward.

And a few lines later he adds:

Heart and soul are with the brain in all investigation - a truth which some know in rare, beautiful intervals, and others never.... 34

The cut-and-dry knowledge of factual data is here to be contrasted with an understanding in which emotion plays an important part (and, as we have seen above, Hudson thought it played some part in all investigation; however hemmed in by rationality and however unacknowledged its contribution might be), in relation to the 'material and spiritual' sense of things. W.J. Keith notes that,

In The Book of a Naturalist [Hudson] observes: 'Unless the soul goes out to meet what we see we do not see it; nothing do we see, not a beetle, not a blade of grass.' And as early as Nature in Downland he sums up the matter in five italicized words - 'what we see we feel.' 35

Let us say, then, that Hudson sees our experience, and understanding, as essentially trans-objective. There is, in the experience of things, a transcendence of the realm of objectified data. We come back, here, to Hudson's contrast between 'living' and 'dead' nature, and his attack on the identification of museum exhibits with living creatures. 'Nature was for him essentially living,' writes Keith,

and he had nothing but contempt for those who automatically associate natural history with dead, mounted specimens arranged according to scientific orderliness. 36

It was the living world the being inhabited, its life within that world, which was of interest to Hudson:

To weigh, count, measure, and dissect for purposes of identification, classification, and what not, and to search in bones and tissues for hidden affinities, it is necessary to see closely; but this close seeing would be out of place and a hindrance in other lines of inquiry. To know the creature, undivested of life or liberty or of anything belonging to it, it must be seen with an atmosphere, in the midst of the nature in which it harmoniously moves and has its being.... 37

Hence his outbursts against museum exhibits and those who admire the specimens of 'ancient, dusty, dead little birds, painful to look at'; such people, in admiring these exhibits, showed their ignorance of real nature - living nature - and the effect it produces on the attentive mind:

[Such people] have never properly seen anything in nature, but have looked away with mind and the inner vision preoccupied with other and familiar things - indoor scenes and objects, and scenes described in

books. If they had ever looked at wild birds properly - that is to say, emotionally, the images of such sights would have remained in their minds; and, with such a standard for comparison, these dreary remnants of dead things set before them as restorations and as semblances of life would have only produced a profoundly depressing effect. 38

He continues:

These objects in a museum are not and cannot be viewed emotionally, as we view living forms and all nature: hence they do not, and we being what we are, cannot, register lasting impressions. 39

John Frederick's comment on this passage, and the use of the term 'emotional', is worth quoting; in addition to the term meaning

intensely, with active attentiveness so that details of colour and action, of sound and setting, are registered precisely in the consciousness of the observer[ , ]

Frederick states that,

for Hudson, 'emotionally' also means with insight, with a degree of participation in the life of the creatures observed, with understanding, even with empathy. 40

We are participants, not mere spectators or analysts; we share, through our feeling, in what we see; the quality of attention is indeed, as I have noted above, empathetic. The quality of this passage, describing how the 'silvery thistle-down' of the Sussex Downs, covering the 'sky above... with its million floating flecks of white', reminds Hudson of the

old days on horseback on the open pampa.... But the South American thistle-down, both of the giant thistle and the cardoon with its huge flower-heads, was much larger and whiter and infinitely more abundant. By day the air seemed full of it, and I remember that when out with my brother we often enjoyed seeing it at night. After a day or days of wind it would be found in immense masses in the sheltered hollows, or among the tall standing stalks of the dry plants. These masses gleamed with a strange whiteness in the dark, and it used to please us to gallop our horses through them. Horses are nervous, unintelligent creatures, liable to take fright at the most familiar objects, and our animals would sometimes be in terror at finding themselves plunged breast-deep into this unsubstantial whiteness, that moved with them and covered them with a cloud. 41

It is nature living in memory, and conjured up with the memory of loss; yet, because of its persistence, its fullness of presencing in memory, it is not wholly lost. It has the emotional force of something which is both lost and



regained. But his understanding of living beings, in its empathetic aspects, can be seen in a passage which demands to be put alongside this, as it also deals with thistles - and then in a powerful imagistic comparison shifts to the 'passions' of birds:

The cardoon thistle, a big plant which in my time covered hundreds of square miles of the plain in my district [of South America], has a very large flower, twice as large as that of the artichoke, which it resembles, and the down it produces is correspondingly large. In the late summer, at the end of January, on a windy day the sky was often seen full of the great silvery floating globes of down. When the wind fell they would settle on the earth in such abundance that the whole plain would be thickly sprinkled over with them, so that it would have a misty or downy appearance. I have sat on my horse on a calm hot day in late summer viewing the plain, burnt yellow after the two hottest months of December and January, stretching level before me to the horizon, and as far as one could see glistening with the million million balls of down lightly resting on the surface of the grass. Then there would be a slight tremor in the down at the first faint breath of a coming wind; a tremor that would momentarily increase until the topmost globes, resting lightly on the surface, would begin to sway and move and finally rise, to float off like soap bubbles, while still others would tremble and sway, but fail to rise because obstructed by the grasses they rested against. These too would eventually free themselves as the current of air increased in strength, and would float too; while others, still more obstructed, would remain behind until, the wind still increasing, even these would be torn away from the blades and stems that held them and rise after the others, and eventually the whole air would be full of the down flying before the wind.

Even so it is with the birds, I have said, when they are touched with that breath i.e., of the 'passion of migration' - that first disturbing influence and impulse; when the first tremor, the first indication of it, is seen in their behaviour, and when it increases until first the most volatile and swift-winged and most sensitive among them are lifted up and carried away, while others still hold on to their places, to be at last torn away by a power that overcomes all resistance - whirled away on their long aerial voyage. 42

In passages such as these, things are meaningful through being embedded in a network of human emotions or associations.<sup>43</sup> This comes out strongly in Hudson's musings on the expressive quality of flowers or of bird-song, which he interprets according to human associations, e.g. the blue petals of a flower remind the observer of the blue of a person's eyes. This idea with regard to flowers is developed at length in Chapter Seven of Birds and Man ('A Secret of the Charm of Flowers'); and we can link this with his idea,

expressed in Hampshire Days, that sympathy with animals comes about through an association of the animals with our fellow humans, that is,

an overflow of that regard for the rights of and compassion for others of our kind which are at the foundations of the social instinct. 44

This homocentric pole of Hudson's writings is perhaps responsible for a notable weakness, his whimsical and sentimental anthropomorphic passages where he imagines animals to be carrying on in a distinctly human way and (literally) puts words into their mouths (or beaks); the chapter 'My Friend the Pig' in The Book of a Naturalist is a famous example, the conversation between the two jackdaws in The Land's End a less well-known but comparable one.<sup>45</sup> The humour and sympathy of 'My Friend the Pig', in particular, can be remarked; but one also needs to remark the loss of an empathetic attention to otherness. However, we can note certain correctives to this homocentric perspective. In The Land's End he amends his earlier view on flowers (in Birds and Man), and states that for some blue flowers, for example, the emotional association is not with blue eyes but with the blueness of the sky.<sup>46</sup> And in Adventures Among Birds he writes:

But expression is not everything; there is a charm in some sounds so great that we love them from the first time of hearing, when they are without associations with a happy past; and in such cases we can suppose that the emotional expression, if it exists at all, is produced indirectly and forms but a slight element in the aesthetic effect. 47

In this passage we can see a recognition of the phenomenon's distinctive qualities, valued apart from whatever human associations, or past memories of the individual's life, it may conjure up. In other words, its value isn't derived from the human subject who is contemplating it. A different sort of corrective to the homocentric pole in Hudson's vision can be found in a certain pessimism regarding human virtues and qualities in comparison with those of animals; e.g. in A Hind in Richmond Park he writes:

If by an exercise of magic I could have projected the power of abstract thought into [the hind's] cervine brains our colloquy would have been more interesting, and she would have told me how much I had lost by

developing a bigger brain and assuming an erect position on my hind legs. Thus, my muscular sense and sense of equilibrium, with perfect co-ordination of all the nerves and faculties in me, were inferior to hers.... A great quarrel, with many keen thrusts on both sides, also with some laughter, and all the time the feeling in me, bitter as death, that she had the best of the argument; that it would have been better that animal life had continued till the time of the dying of all life on the earth with no such development as that of the large-brained being who walks erect and smiling looks on heaven. 48

(Elsewhere in the same book, he writes of the speed and powers of physical endurance of swifts or devlings, and comments:

And even as the lower animals thus excel us in physical power and speed and endurance, so do they surpass us in beauty of form and colouring, grace of motion, and in melody.) 49

An over-dependence upon the homocentric matrix of feeling is only one tendency or pole within Hudson's writings; we can point, in his best pages, to an attention based in feeling, which is concentrated upon the thing in its alterity.<sup>50</sup> Frederick is right, therefore, to stress the importance of insight - the gain of insight into the phenomenon. It is because of this - the importance of the thing, the phenomenon itself - that I chose to refer to Hudson's vision as 'trans-objective' rather than as 'subjective'; for that latter term tends too readily to conjure up a priority on the part of the subject which, at its best, is resisted by the quality of Hudson's attention. That is to say, he cares too much for things to relegate them to the status of mere convenient receptacles for the ebb and flow of his own feelings. It is the meeting, so to speak, of the phenomenon with the emotionally engaged attention which constitutes the 'trans-objective' quality of his descriptions. This emotional engagement holds fast to the specific things. In A Hind in Richmond Park he speaks of 'the thing itself' in these terms:

... apart from the aesthetic feelings which the object or scene or atmospheric conditions may rouse, and from the sense of novelty, the lively interest we experience at times in what we see and smell and hear and feel, and from other causes operating in us, there is a sense of the thing itself - of the tree or wood, the rock, river, sea, mountain, the soil, clay or gravel, or sand or chalk, the cloud, the

rain, and what not - something, let us say, penetrative, special, individual, as if the quality of the thing itself had entered into us, changing us, affecting body and mind. 51

With this idea in mind - that Hudson's sort of emotional attention to things is disclosive in nature - we might consider his statement that 'intuition... reveals the hidden true meaning and the right and wrong of things....'<sup>52</sup>

Intuition, insight: the terms could be fairly well interchanged here.

Something is disclosed, seen to be the case, seen as it is. That which is disclosed is a particular modality of being, and this is grasped, borne in upon the mind. It is in this way - through attention to the disclosure of beings and things - that the naturalist, the poetic naturalist like Hudson, may succeed in seeing and conveying 'the supernatural in all natural things'.

This phrase occurs in a passage where Hudson is discussing what it is to see and to describe things in a fresh, vivid, emotional way, so that they can be said to live in the mind. He concludes:

We may say that impressions are vivid and live vividly in the mind, even to the end of life, in those alone in whom something of the child survives in the adult - the measureless delight in all this visible world, experienced every day by the millions of children happily born outside the city's gates, but so rarely expressed in literature, as Traherne, let us say, expressed it; and, with the delight, the sense of wonder in all life, which is akin to, if not one with, the mythical faculty, and if experienced in a high degree is a sense of the supernatural in all natural things. 53

The power of conveying 'the supernatural in all natural things', can be seen as a level of that ability to see and convey emotionally the things of the natural world, which Hudson consistently refers to as the poetic way of seeing and conveying.

It is the poets, Hudson believed, who are able to convey the vivid sense of a thing, to make it live before the imaginative eye. Speaking of when he was a boy in South America, he says (in Birds and Man):

... my imagination was fired by all that had been said of the charm [of English birds], not indeed by frigid ornithologists, but by a long succession of great poets, from Chaucer down to those of our own time. 54

And in The Book of a Naturalist, he writes:

... if we have known the [serpent], 'at home or abroad, and wish in reading to recover the impression of a sweet summer-hot Nature that invites our caresses, always with a subtle serpent somewhere concealed in the folds of her garments, we must go to literature rather than science. The poet has the secret, not the naturalist.... It is because the poet does not see his subject apart from its surroundings, deprived of its atmosphere - a mere fragment of beggarly matter - does not see it too well, with all the details which become visible only after a minute and, therefore, cold examination, but as a part of the picture, a light that quivers and quickly passes, that we, through him, are able to see it too, and to experience the old mysterious sensations, restored by his magic touch. For the poet is emotional.... 55

This emotional, 'trans-objective' way of seeing and evoking or describing things - which he marks off from the over-precise view obtained through 'cold examination' - is, for Hudson, the poetic; and his own position is that of a poetic writer - a poetic naturalist and a poetic novelist and story-writer. For Hudson as for Simone Weil, 'The poet produces the beautiful by fixing his attention on something real.'<sup>56</sup> The real, though, is in nature elusive, and it can be necessary to forsake conventional ideas of the 'realistic' in order to let the imagination pierce further - to those 'hidden modalities of being'. The fiction follows this through in a way which the nature writings only suggest. In the following chapters I will look at the way Hudson approaches a symbolic conception of the real, through first looking at his vision of the natural world as a realm charged with mystery; and at the question of the imagination.

Chapter Three

Walter de la Mare remarked that the sense of the supernatural in all things, above all [else]... is the sign manual of all Hudson's writings. All beauty - and in spite of the horrors of life, in spite of the fleetingness of happiness, man has made this supreme discovery - all beauty appeals to our delight in mystery and wonder. 57

Hudson's writing conveys what de la Mare refers to as those 'ecstatic moments' where

the mere words momentarily illumine [the 'alien life' of nature], as may the flame of a singularly clear candle the objects in a dark and beautiful room. 58

De la Mare also says that:

any one of his treasured books transitorily illumines and revivifies for us a world to which we are habitually strangers. We all but recover a foregone and secret understanding. 59

That understanding is of a nature imbued with supernatural mystery - rather than the alienated nature of objectified data. Illumination and recovery: we could hardly hope to find better concepts for characterising this aspect of Hudson's writing. But what sort of world is it that Hudson's writing illumines, and hence recovers for us? It is, de la Mare tells us aptly,

a marvellous small paradise as was [given to] the First Man before Eve was taken out of his side. 60

The smallness of the natural paradise - or rather its intimacy, the fact that the epiphanic vision, the disclosure of the supernatural in or through the natural, is mainly concentrated upon small particulars (a tree or even a leaf) - is also very much of the essence here. Generalities, systematic concepts, which divert the attention from what we actually live with - the details of that world - are sabotaged by this concern for individual and often minute and seemingly 'insignificant' particulars. As a contemporary American poet, George Evans, writes:

small things are radical  
since large things rule - 61

The experience of the spiritual through the natural or ordinary things of the world removes us from the notion of the supernatural as something which draws attention to itself through being 'abnormal', standing apart from ordinary things. Virgil Ierunca (commenting on the novels of Mircea Eliade), writes:

The intervention of the sacred in the world is always camouflaged, there is no apparent difference between the sacred and the profane.... 62

At any rate, it is true - if not, for example, of the vision of Ezekial, or of what we term miracles - of epiphany in Hudson.<sup>63</sup> It should be noted, at the same time, that Hudson reverted to a more disruptive form of symbolic discourse, calling attention to itself more expressly as symbolism, in certain of the fictional works; I shall return to this later in this Part of the thesis, as well as in Part Two.

The sort of things which make manifest the supernatural for Hudson, can be seen by looking at a few passages from his work. In A Traveller in Little Things, he writes of an apple tree in blossom:

It is like nothing in earth, unless we say that, indescribable in its loveliness, it is like all other sights in nature which wake in us a sense of the supernatural. 64

In Afoot in England, he writes of a sunset:

The sun, sinking over the hills towards Swyre and Bridport, turned crimson before it touched the horizon. The sky became luminous; the yellow Chesil Bank, stretching long leagues away, and the hills behind it, changed their colours to violet. The rough sea near the beach glittered like gold; the deep green water, flecked with foam, was mingled with fire; the one boat that remained on it, tossing up and down near the beach, was like a boat of ebony in a glittering fiery sea.... [The joy of this vision] was a sense of lightness and freedom from all trammels as if the body had become air, essence, energy, or soul, and of union with all visible nature, one with sea and land and the entire vast overarching sky.

And he then speaks of 'the world glorified - transfigured....'<sup>65</sup> In The Book of a Naturalist it is a dark-hued, unusual flower called the henbane

which provides Hudson with a sense of the supernatural (which he sometimes also calls animism - employing that term in a somewhat idiosyncratic way).<sup>66</sup>

Speaking of the flower's effect on him, he says:

I rather incline to believe that the source of the vivid interest excited is that faculty of the mind supposed to be obsolete, but which still faintly lives in all of us, though we may be unconscious of it - a faculty which sees a hidden meaning or spirit in all strange appearances in the natural world. It is the 'sense of mystery', and it is with us in sight of a magnificent and strange sunset, and of any unusual atmospheric strangeness, down to the smallest objects that engage our attention - an insect, a flower, even our chequered daffodil of the river-fields. 67

All strange appearances - such as the chequered daffodil: this gives us pause, until we understand that Hudson means all those appearances which suddenly strike us as singular, awakening us from our more usual attention to things, where they are background, by-and-large, glided over or vaguely noticed or sensed - or else taken as alienated, objectified 'facts', 'sense-data'. In another passage - from The Land's End - it is the furze-bush, with its 'blossoms that are frankincense and flame', which in its singularity made the great botanist Carl Linnaeus fall to his knees in reverence - a story that Hudson tells with obvious sympathy.<sup>68</sup> In Afoot in England, it is a morning sea-scape and the gulls that populate it. In this passage, Hudson discusses the disparity, as he sees it, between seeing and describing.<sup>69</sup>

The passage is worth quoting virtually in its entirety:

... over all - the distant sea, the ridge of low dunes marking where the earth ended, and the flat yellow expanse between - there brooded a soft bluish silvery haze. A haze that blotted nothing out, but blended and interfused them all until earth and air and sea and sands were scarcely distinguishable. The effect, delicate, mysterious, unearthly, cannot be described.... Do we not see that words fail as pigments do - that the effect is too coarse, since in describing it we put it before the mental eye as something distinctly visible, a thing of itself and separate. But it is not so in nature; the effect is of something almost invisible and is yet a part of all and makes all things - sky and sea and land - as unsubstantial as itself. Even living, moving things had that aspect. Far out on the lowest furthest strip of sand, which appeared to be on a level with the sea, gulls were seen standing in twos and threes and small groups and in rows; but they did not look like gulls - familiar birds, gull-shaped with grey and white plumage. They appeared twice as big as gulls, and were of a dazzling whiteness



and of no definite shape: though standing still they had motion, an effect of the quivering dancing air, the 'visible heat'; at rest, they were seen now as separate objects; then as one with the silver sparkle on the sea; and when they rose and floated away they were no longer shining and white, but like pale shadows of winged forms faintly visible in the haze.

They were not birds but spirits - beings that lived in or were passing through the world and now, like the heat, made visible; and I, standing far out on the sparkling sands, with the sparkling sea on one side and the line of dunes, indistinctly seen as land, on the other, was one of them; and if any person had looked at me from a distance he would have seen me as a formless shining white being standing by the sea, and then perhaps as a winged shadow floating in the haze. It was only necessary to put out one's arms to float. That was the effect on my mind: this natural world was changed to a supernatural, and there was no matter or force in sea or land nor in the heavens above, but only spirit. 70

The supernatural issues here in a symbolic dimension, where bird makes manifest spirit or the spirit. This dimension can be seen working similarly in Hudson's nature-writings in terms of a symbolism of undying life.<sup>71</sup>

Cyclical recovery, dependent upon an analogical connection between plant-life and human existence, can be glimpsed in this passage from The Book of a Naturalist, where Hudson says of spring flowers that

remembrances of our lost childhood, dead and lost these many dim and sorrowful years, [are] now recovered with the flowers, and immortal once more with the spring's immortality! 72

If youth is recoverable, life itself may also - in image at least - assert itself as undying. Hudson's belief in the immortality of the soul was dislodged by certain contemporaneous currents of thought, but the image appears, as well as certain attempts at belief of a residual kind, in spite of the inroads made upon the dogma of survival. We find such an image, with the analogy partly submerged, in this passage on furze in The Land's End:

The colour of bracken, living or dead - of a plant so universal and abundant - is familiar to everybody, yet I would like now to dwell at some length on its winter colour because it is a strange thing in itself - one of the most beautiful hues in nature which appears in a dead and faded vegetation after the beech-like brilliant autumn tints of russet, gold and copper-red have vanished, and glows and lives again and yet again, right on to the time when the deep undying roots shall thrust up new stems to uncurl at their tips, spreading out green fresh fronds to cover and conceal that mystery, even as we cover our dead, beautiful in death, with earth and with green and flowering plant. 73

Elsewhere he contents himself with noting appearances of undying life in the natural world, but without the analogical implication:

[Beech leaves] always seem to be alive. It is a leaf that refuses to die wholly. When separated from the tree it has, if not immortality, at all events a second, longer life. Oak and ash and chestnut leaves fade from month to month and blacken, and finally rot and mingle with the earth, while the beech leaf keeps its sharp clean edges unbroken, its hard texture and fiery colour, its buoyancy and rustling incisive sound. Swept by the autumn winds into sheltered hollows and beaten down by rains, the leaves lie mingled in one dead, sodden mass for days and weeks at a time, and appear ready to mix with the soil; but frost and sun suck up the moisture and the dead come to life again. They glow like fire, and tremble at every breath. 74

The symbolic resonance in such passages is admittedly of a residual or punctured quality which we can also see in much of Hudson's nature writing; it is at its 'fullest' in the novel Green Mansions and the short story 'Marta Riquelme'. I will discuss other symbolic aspects of Hudson's writing later in this Part of the thesis.

Epiphany in nature is also served by the vehicle of singular, intense, or heightened colour. Here I will note that connection between colour as a vehicle, and the immaterial world, which Ruskin brought to consideration.

Stephen Bann writes:

Perhaps no one has written with greater insight about this question than Ruskin, when he describes in a protracted footnote to the last volume of Modern Painters the deep ambivalence of colour in relation to human creativity: 'Colour... is the purifying or sanctifying element of material beauty.... Followed rashly, coarsely, untruly, for the mere pleasure of it, with no reverence, it becomes a temptation, and leads to corruption. Followed faithfully, with intense but reverent passion, it is the holiest of all aspects of material things.'

Colour is therefore for Ruskin the knot which binds together... the material and the immaterial world. 75

We can see colour as a vehicle for the making manifest of the immaterial in nature as well as art. Where form can be reconciled to measure, colour (despite spectral analysis) is less easily contained by rule, quantification - its effect on the senses is often that of a liberation from the too-definite, the bounded.<sup>76</sup>

The way that colour is the vehicle for the 'special moment' in Hudson

can be seen in Nature in Downland where he writes of the 'sacred dim interior' of a grove of yews at Kingly Bottom (near West Stoke), mentioning the striking colours which draw the attention:

In one part of the wood... there is no undergrowth, and in this part you may walk freely among the dark religious trees with trunks like huge rudely-fashioned pillars of red and purple ironstone. One has here the sensation of being in a vast cathedral; not like that of Chichester, but older and infinitely vaster, fuller of light and gloom and mystery, and more wonderful in its associations. 77

Another passage about the yew will serve to bring out more clearly the way that colour serves a supernatural expressive effect:

That ancient sacred character [of the yew-tree], lives still in every mind that has kept any vestige of animism, the root and essence of all that is wonderful and sacred in nature. That red and purple bark is the very colour of life, and this tree's life, compared with other things, is everlasting. The stones we set up as memorials grow worn and seamed and hoary with age, even like men, and crumble to dust at last; in time new stones are put in their place, and these, too, grow old and perish, and are succeeded by others; and through all changes, through the ages, the tree lives on unchanged. With its huge, tough, red trunk; its vast, knotted arms outstretched; its rich, dark mantle of undying foliage, it stands like a protecting god on the earth, patriarch and monarch of woods; and indeed it seems but right and natural that not to oak nor holly, nor any other revered tree, but to the yew it was given to keep guard over the bodies and souls of those who have been laid in the earth. 78

The tree's colour - 'the very colour of life' - joins with its age and with the vegetation-symbolism of its foliage ('undying', as Hudson calls it), to form a symbolic image of supernatural everlasting life. Hudson's perception of colour can also exist at a more purely sensuous - but still refreshingly beautiful, and accurate - level; for example, he writes of the colours of icicle-forms during frost, in Cornwall:

I saw it chiefly on a stream near Zennor that gushes and tumbles over the rocks on its way to the sea and is in great part almost covered with a dense growth of dwarf black-thorn, bramble and furze bushes. Where the water pouring over the boulders splashes the overhanging branches, the constant drops running down the pendant twigs grew into globular or oval crystals; these were mostly about the size as well as shape of ducks' eggs, pure as the purest glass, and had the appearance of a wonderful crystal fruit hanging from stems on the dark purple-red sloe bushes. 79

#### Chapter Four

The instances of epiphany I have given in the last chapter - instances, that is, of the manifestation of the supernatural in or through the natural world - are either directly paradisiac or Edenic (as de la Mare asserts), or at least assimilable to a vision of Paradise - a 'small paradise' of primeval, mythic freshness and beauty. I would call this type of epiphany an 'affirmative' epiphany, since it opens up a world in which things are affirmed as supernaturally valuable or meaningful, and in turn the Spirit - the infinite and eternal, the undying, the boundless - is affirmed through the details of the natural world. But there is another type of epiphany - in which natural details are the vehicle for a glimpse into a terrible emptiness and dread, which similarly involves transcendence of any given thing in this world (in this case, issuing in negation); and if certain examples provide only a faint glimpse of this 'negativity', others disclose it with chilling power.

In Nature in Downland, Hudson reflects on how the insect-life which one day covers the green of the South Downs, would have vanished on another, with the shifting of the seasons. His 'vision' (as he himself calls it) 'of the vanished insect life' begins as a tribute and ends as a plaint:

I moved and had my being amid that life as in a golden mist spread over the earth; my ears were full of the noise of innumerable fine small voices blending into one voice; wheresoever I looked their minute swift-moving bodies appeared as thin dark lines on the air and over the green surface. Forms so infinitely varied, yet so wonderfully fashioned, each aglow with its complete separate life, and all in harmony with all life and all nature, responsive in a million secret springs to each and every external influence; so well balanced in their numerous parts and perfect in their equipment, so intense in their lives as to seem fitted to endure for ever. And now in so short a time, in a single day and night as it seems, it is all over, the feast and fairy-dance of life; myriads of shining gem-like little individual souls dissipated into thin air and blown whithersoever the wind blows! ... The first and inevitable effect of such a thought, when the tremendous tragedy of the

passing year is brought unexpectedly and vividly before the mind, compressed into a moment of time, is a profound melancholy, as of a black shadow of apprehension coming over the soul. 80

Hudson, on the whole, accepts the necessity of pain, destruction and death in an imperfect world, according to the natural laws of that world. In Hampshire Days he writes:

... as things are designed in this world of sentient life there can be no good, no sweetness or pleasure in life, nor peace and contentment and safety, nor happiness and joy, nor any beauty or strength or lustre, nor any bright and shining quality of body and mind, without pain, which is not an accident nor an incident, nor something ancillary to life, but is involved in and a part of life, of its very colour and texture. 81

This acceptance of the fact of pain (and further, death), is indicated, for example, in his account of his cheerful farewell to a favourite pig (in 'My Friend the Pig') which is being taken off to be slaughtered: there is no sense of resistance to the pig's slaughter, and Hudson even jokes about it.<sup>82</sup> But if he accepts killing for food, as well as the inevitable loss of life amongst animals, birds and insects due to the struggle for survival and to chance, the wilful or ignorant infliction of suffering and death is another matter.<sup>83</sup> From his attempts to free a caged white owl at Chichester, as recounted in Nature in Downland, to the compassion Richard Lamb feels for unfortunates and victims in The Purple Land or the compassion shown for various human tragedies in Green Mansions, 'El Ombú', 'Marta Riquelme', and 'An Old Thorn', we have eloquent testimony to Hudson's concern for the sufferings of other beings.<sup>84</sup> This concern is very graphically present in a passage in The Land's End, where he evokes a haunting picture of violence and terror in the Bronze Age of the West Cornish headland:

So in the dreadful past, whenever a wave of Celtic conquest swept west, the unhappy people were driven further and further from the Tamar along that tongue of land, their last refuge, but where there were no rivers and mountains to stay the pursuers, nor forests and marshes in which to hide, until they could go no further, for the salt sea was in front of them. They too, like the frost-afflicted birds, gathered in thousands and sat crowded in every headland and promontory and every stony hill summit, ever turning their worn dusty faces and glazed eyes to the

east to watch for the coming of the foe - the strong, fiendish, broad-faced, blue-eyed men with metal weapons in their hands, spear and sword and battle-axe.

These are the people I think about on dark tempestuous evenings in this solitary place; Bolerium is haunted by the vast ghostly multitude.  
85

Most frequently, however, it is the wanton destruction of bird-life to which Hudson returns, deplorably, in his writings. In A Hind in Richmond Park, for example, he speaks of,

All [the] incalculable destruction of bird life [that] has come about since the seventies of the last century, and is going on now despite the efforts of those who are striving, by promoting legislation and by all other possible means, to save 'the remnant'. But, alas! the forces of brutality, the Caliban in man, are proving too powerful; the lost species are lost for all time, and a thousand years of the strictest protection - a protection it would be impossible to impose on a free people, Calibans or not - would not restore the still existing bird life to the abundance of half a century ago.

The beautiful has vanished and returns not. 86

The destruction of beauty in life, of the visible symbols of the Spirit; and the triumph of 'the forces of brutality': this in itself is an example of that 'negativity' which 'negative' epiphany discloses. But there is a crack or fracture in Hudson's acceptance of pain and loss in nature - over and above a sense of brutality and moral wrong on the part of humankind - through which emptiness and horror yawn. In The Land's End, he writes of an experience of extreme cold and fierce wind on Zennor Hill:

From the summit where I tried to shelter myself from the fury of the wind among the large black masses of granite, the scene I looked upon was exceedingly desolate. The brown moor stretched away inland, lonely and dark, to the horizon. There was on all that expanse but one small object to arrest the sight - a frozen pool a couple of miles away which gleamed like grey glass in the level beams. Many hearth fires were burning, one not above a mile from the hill and near enough for one to see the yellow flames running before the wind and leaping a dozen to twenty yards high. The sun seen through the vast clouds of dun smoke had the appearance of a globe of fiery red copper. After it had gone down and the earth began to darken the smoke took an intense orange colour from the flames, which seen against the pale blue sky gave a dreadful magnificence to the scene. 87

Returning home, he goes to bed, but is unable to sleep.

... the wind increased in violence as the hours went on, making its doleful wailing and shrieking noises all round the house and causing

the doors and windows to rattle in their frames. In spirit I was in it, out on the hillside where the birds were in their secret hiding-places, in the black furze and heath, in holes and crevices in the hedges, their little hearts beating more languidly each hour, their eyes glazing, until stiff and dead they dropped from their perches. And I was on the summit of the hill among the rude granite castles and sacred places of men who had their day on this earth thousands and thousands of years ago. Here there are great blocks and slabs of granite which have been artificially hollowed into basins - for what purpose, who shall say? The rain falls and fills them to the brim with crystal-clear water, and in summer the birds drink and bathe in these basins. But they were doubtless made for another, possibly for some dreadful, purpose. Perhaps they were filled from time to time with the blood of captive men sacrificed on the hill-top to some awful god of the ancient days. Now it seemed to me, out there in spirit on the hill, that the darkest imaginings of man - the blackest phantom or image of himself which he has sacrificed to - was not so dark as this dreadful unintelligible and unintelligent power that made us, in which we live and move and have our being. 88

Hudson refers to this as a glimpse of a 'terrible aspect of nature', but as the passage above says, our own being participates in it.<sup>89</sup> It is concordant with that blind mechanistic necessity invoked by Darwinism.<sup>90</sup> But beyond any such specific reference, it invokes a 'dark', awesome 'negativity' which has to be set over against the disclosures of 'affirmative' epiphany.

In the experience of this desolation which Hudson evokes in the passage above, it appears as the ground of our being (or, to be more precise, the ground of certain modes of our being), rather than simply a perception of certain distressing details of nature; it becomes part of a 'negative' perception of being, and stands in direct contrast to the Edenic perceptions in Hudson's writings.

In a world in which there is so much of contingency, the struggle for survival, and violent and evil impulses and passions, beauty and the paradisiac endure as fractured and elusive subjects of experience, threatened constantly. This is the sense of things given especially in Green Mansions, one of his most profound and important works. 91

## Chapter Five

The relationship between emotional seeing and the actuality of the thing seen, in 'trans-objective' experience, has been referred to above (Chapter Two). This relationship - as found in Hudson - corresponds to the unity of imagination, or human spirit, and nature, as revealed in moments of epiphany, that was postulated by the Romantic poets and the Transcendentalists.<sup>92</sup>

Roger Ebbatson has noted that the 'intuitive, revelatory powers of Nature' are held in common by Romanticism and Transcendentalism.<sup>93</sup> Speaking specifically of the Transcendentalists, Ebbatson writes:

In this Transcendental vision Nature is to be construed as a set of symbols to be understood by aid of the sovereign imagination. As Emerson says, 'The world of the senses is a world of shows; it does not exist for itself, but has a symbolic character'... (...) Nature has furnished man with language and a system of symbols: 'man is an analogist, and studies relations in all things' [Emerson].<sup>94</sup>

A symbolic reading of nature's text is the concern, then, of the imagination, that intuitive faculty which is capable of

the instant plunge to the flaming heart, to the shaping form of things and people - God's image in man.<sup>95</sup>

It provides not only, in some sense, a 'deeper' or 'further' reading, but one which is 'other', i.e. penetrating to those most hidden modalities of being which Eliade has spoken of. As Elémire Zolla has written, imagination

is 'the mind's tongue that works and tests into the very rock heart' [Ruskin] to drink the sap of reality. Only imagination can grasp the moral truth, entering like a possessing spirit into landscapes, trees, animals, people, unimpeded by selfish cares, at one with nature....<sup>96</sup>

By moral truth we might understand spiritual truth here; nature being understood as a hieroglyphic text, and the project of penetrating the meaning of the characters - the things or beings, and their interrelations - of that text being a spiritual pursuit.<sup>97</sup> But this truth is something that might be expressed by symbolic and linguistic means that don't directly imitate or



describe so as to achieve an illusion of empirical reality. In order faithfully to make manifest those supernatural modalities of being I have referred to in relation to Hudson, a directly descriptive, imitative mode of art or writing may serve its purpose; but the creative, image-making, and symbolising rôles of the imagination should not - cannot - be neglected as an alternative or an adjunct to this more purely descriptive, mimetic function. Indeed, it is difficult to separate them completely, in as much as 'pure' description comes alive in those imagistic passages which capture something - some impression, feeling, or sense of things - deftly in a strong, 'fresh' image, often bearing some symbolic resonance. Hudson speaks of the imagination as 'the highest faculty we have' and says it 'is like intuition, or prophetic' (i.e. it 'leaps forward' to grasp something unforeseen - such as a relationship between different things, which, set down in words, suddenly illuminates the character of those things).

With this notion of the imagination in mind, I wish to look briefly at Hudson's remarks on the disparity of seeing and writing.

In many of his writings, Hudson refers to the most singular - and the most spiritual - experiences of existence as being impossible to convey adequately to another. For example, in giving a beautiful evocation of a massed number of golden plover, he deprecates the possibility of 'really' describing it:

After its arrival in September, the plains in the neighbourhood of my home were peopled with immense flocks of this bird. Sometimes in hot summers the streams and marshes would mostly dry up, and the aquatic bird population, the plover included, would shift their quarters to other districts. During one of these droughty seasons, when my age was nine, there was a marshy ground two miles from my house where a few small pools of water still remained, and to this spot the golden plover would resort every day at noon. They would appear in flocks from all quarters, flying to it like starlings in England coming in to some great roosting centre on a winter evening. I would then mount my pony and gallop off joyfully to witness the spectacle. Long before coming in sight of them the noise of their voices would be audible, growing louder as I drew near. Coming to the ground, I would pull up my horse and sit gazing with astonishment and delight at the spectacle of that

immense multitude of birds, covering an area of two or three acres, looking less like a vast flock than a floor of birds, in colour a rich deep brown, in strong contrast to the pale grey of the dried-up ground all around them. A living, moving floor and a sounding one as well, and the sound too was amazing. It was like the sea, but unlike it in character since it was too deep; it was more like the wind blowing, let us say, on thousands of tight-drawn wires of varying thicknesses, vibrating them to shrill sound, a mass and tangle of ten thousand sounds. But it is indescribable and unimaginable. 99

In Birds and Man, he writes that the most enduring scenes,

live in their loveliness only for him who has seen and harvested them: they cannot be pictured forth to another by words, nor with the painter's brush.... 100

Again, in The Naturalist in La Plata, he says that,

the flight of the sea-mew is not more impossible to us than the power to picture forth the image of Nature in our souls, when she reveals herself in one of those 'special moments' which have 'special grace' in situations where her wild beauty has never been spoiled by man. 101

We can infer from this the source of Hudson's impatience with the notion of 'art for art's sake', expressed in a letter to Morley Roberts, and his praise of William Morris because Morris

had come to the stage when a man can despise perfection in art as not a thing great enough for man. This has been my idea [as well]. 102

This feeling with regard to the inadequacy of art combines with his own modesty in the famous remark from his last book,

No sooner have I finished a book than I come, rover-like, to hate it: a proper instinct. 103

We might say that Hudson failed, in his statements about art, to give the imagination its full due. He recognised the powers of straightforward description to circumscribe and detail the external particulars of a scene or situation or being, but he failed to account, for example, for the power of the heightened, compressed, elliptical speech of poetry, and in general the symbolic, mythopoeic, imagistic and evocative capacities of imaginative writing, to work at a greater depth and intensity of feeling, insight, vision.

Hudson unfortunately showed a lack of ability to think out the

relationship of art to the symbolic. For example, he writes:

In Patagonia I found in some fragments of ancient primitive pottery of baked clay an ornamentation made by pressing the fingertips with the curved nails on the moist clay; then I found other fragments partly decorated symmetrically with small rhomboidal marks, and this decoration had been made by pressing the segmented shell of the armadillo on the clay before baking. This, I should say, was the first conscious step taken in the direction of plastic art after the involuntary print of a foot on the wet sand had stirred the sense of beauty and the creative instinct. 104

Our present understanding of archaic art would provide us with the ability to see that the symbolic possibilities or functions of the circular mark (moon or half-moon, for example), or of the foot-print, precede the aesthetic or decorative. Hudson's reduction of art to the beautiful leaves out those other aspects of art - the sublime, the mythopoeic, the mystical, the numinous, the magical, etc. - which he of all people should have recognized, given both his interests in general and his own fiction.

In Hudson's writings, it is the imagistic qualities - those haiku-like moments - of his descriptive passages that raise them into a different category than mere straightforward, 'external' observation, giving them, at times, a symbolic resonance; and to this we must add the intensity of vision and feeling informing his prose narratives, and the greater scope, especially in Green Mansions, for symbolic or mythopoeic resonances he allows himself. Admittedly, the symbolic may draw attention to itself by departing from that apparent indivisibility of the supernatural and the natural we find elsewhere in Hudson, by stressing singularity to an unusual degree, as in the figure of Rima in Green Mansions; and the work must then resist being appropriated by 'fantasy' or 'invention', in the sense of that which is merely subjective and capricious. But that apparent indivisibility itself, of which I have just spoken, is problematic within its own terms; for how, when keeping to a description of actuality, make apparent that infusion of the spiritual in the material - and not just give an impression

of purely external, material appearances? It is the symbolic thrust of the imagination which we must look to for an answer; it would appear that there must be at least a resonance of the symbolic - an impression or sense of 'otherness' - in any writing for us to speak of an infusion of the spiritual into the material.

## Chapter Six

Hudson's responsiveness to nature makes possible an awareness in his writings of the symbolic possibilities of the natural. The spiritual becomes seen in terms of a symbolic geography, where modes of being are manifested spatially, so to speak, as zones of being.

The Earthly Paradise is so much a dominant religious and cultural myth in the West as to need no introduction in itself; and I have already remarked on the Edenic quality of Hudson's perception of natural details - wherein a sense of supernatural perfection, splendour and beauty is disclosed in 'special moments'. The following passage from The Land's End is scarcely atypical in its reference to a sacred or blessed zone (in this instance, drawing on John Bunyan):

But over all the revelations of the glory of flowers I have experienced in this land I hold my first sight of heather in bloom on the Scottish moors in August shortly after coming to this country. I remember how I went out and walked many miles over the moors, lured ever on by the sight of that novel loveliness until I was lost in a place where no house was visible, and how at intervals when the sun broke through the clouds and shone on some distant hill or slope from which the grey mist had just lifted, revealing the purple colour beneath, it appeared like a vision of the Delectable Mountains. 105

If details of the countryside become most readily assimilable, through moments of affirmative epiphany, to a paradisiac vision, the 'moods' of nature (which are also nature's facts), in conjunction with the emotional seeing and understanding of the observer, can be - as we have seen - the subject of 'negative' epiphany. The 'spirit of the place' of Zennor Hill in winter, in the passage quoted above (in Chapter Four), is scarcely paradisiac or Edenic. The use of a remote place - South America, certainly remote to most of Hudson's English readers - in particular permitted the imaginative projective of wide-ranging modes of being in terms of different zones: a subject I will return to in the discussion of Hudson's novels in

Part Two. Human exploration and journeying, with its suggestion of the spiritual Quest, function in the same general way in many other writers, as the locus for an analogical exploration of spiritual states and unfamiliar modalities of being. We might instance - beside the obvious example of Bunyan - Melville's use of sea-faring in Moby Dick. But difference in place alone can serve in the same way as a vehicle for such an exploration; and for the dominantly urban-based reading public, Thoreau's account of Walden Pond, Hudson's A Shepherd's Life, or James Agee's account of Alabama sharecroppers in Let Us Now Praise Famous Men, also function as journeys into the unfamiliar. The country of A Crystal Age, Hudson's Utopian romance, is an obvious extension of this tendency, and one which, incidentally, fits in with a recurrent nineteenth century trend towards 'visions of paradises and utopias'.<sup>106</sup>

Besides this generalised symbolic geography, the details of existence may carry a specific symbolic significance; we have seen how this is the case, in Chapter Three, in the example of vegetation participating in the symbolism of undying life. I will briefly consider some related aspects of vegetation-symbolism here. One of the most interesting examples of plant symbolism in Hudson is his poignant story 'An Old Thorn' (which I will consider in more detail in Part Two), concerned (in part) with the theme of tree-worship. In the belief of the story's protagonist, the tree is miraculously or supernaturally able to help shape a person's fate; this invokes an aspect traditionally symptomatic of tree-symbolism, of more-than-natural powers. Another example is the correspondence Hudson draws between flowers and children; this may seem merely a sentimental convention, but it is possible to draw out a symbolic aspect or dimension. Hudson's concern with particularity in the passage below may at least alert us to the care given to this matter of correspondence - and make us wonder if there may be more involved than sentimental convention; he is here writing of a young

girl, in A Traveller in Little Things:

The features were perfect, and she was pale, or so it had seemed to me at first, but when viewing her more closely I saw that colour was an important part in her loveliness - a colour so delicate that I fell to comparing her flower-like face with this or that particular flower. I had thought of her as a snowdrop at first, then a windflower, the March anemone, with its touch of crimson, then various white, ivory, and cream-coloured blossoms with a faintly-seen pink blush to them. 107

Elsewhere in the same book he writes:

Thinking of the numerous company of little girls of infinite charm I have met, and of their evanishment, I have a vision of myself on horse-back on the illimitable green level pampas, under the wide sunlit cerulean sky in late September or early October, when the wild flowers are at their best before the wilting heats of summer.

Seeing the flowers so abundant, I dismount and lead my horse by the bridle and walk knee-deep in the lush grass, stooping down at every step to look closely at the shy, exquisite blooms in their dewy morning freshness and divine colours. Flowers of an inexpressible unearthly loveliness and unforgettable; for how forget them when their images shine, in memory in all their pristine morning brilliance!

That is how I remember and love to remember them, in that first fresh aspect, not as they appear later, the petals wilted or dropped, sun-browned, ripening their seed and fruit.

And so with the little human flowers. I love to remember and think of them as flowers, not as ripening or ripened into young ladies, matrons, mothers of sons and daughters. 108

If transience surely plays a part in the meaning here, so does the perception of 'unearthly loveliness'; most importantly, children correspond to plants in terms of a symbolism of a new beginning, a return to the purity of the beginning: the Edenic conception of mythic-primeval harmony with nature. In The Book of a Naturalist Hudson speaks of the child's 'nearness to or oneness with Nature'.<sup>109</sup> We can catch this in Hudson's identification of children with flowers and his regret over their passing into maturity - seen rather as a falling-away into a sort of decay ('the petals wilted or dropped, sun-browned...'); a falling-away from that regeneration of 'new life'. Mircea Eliade has shown, in Patterns in Comparative Religion, how plant hierophanies recur in 'primitive' myths and rituals on a universal scale; these ideas have survived in folklore as well as in certain occult traditions, and can be found also in European art and literature.<sup>110</sup> Plants have traditionally symbolized, not just life, growth, the organic, but such

principles as 'new life', regeneration, recurrent and never-extinguished life. Some of the myths and folk-tales Eliade recounts explicitly link, or identify, children with flowers: i.e. the flower is new life issuing from the tree or from the 'womb' of the earth, as the child is new life issuing from the mother. (In addition he recounts various myths and folk-tales dealing with the transformation of dead persons into plants - signifying regeneration, or the resumption of life in a new form, after death.)<sup>111</sup> I would instance this traditional symbolism as a correspondence (rather than an influence), even if of a perhaps somewhat limited nature (in as much as the symbolic aspects in Hudson are only suggested, not presented - let alone developed - in depth).

Another type of symbolism already touched upon (again, in Chapter Four) is that relating to birds. This is especially important in Hudson. Bird-symbolism (where, basically, the bird signifies the soul or spirit) is both very ancient and very wide-spread. Writing of bird and flight symbolism, Mircea Eliade says:

It is probable that the mythico-ritual theme 'bird - soul - ecstatic flight' was already extant in the paleolithic epoch; one can, indeed, interpret in this sense some of the designs at Altamire (man with the mask of a bird), and the famous relief of Lascaux (man with a bird's head), in which Horst Kirchner sees the representation of a shamanic trance. As for the mythical conceptions of the soul as a bird and as a spirit-guide (psychopomp), they have been studied enough for us to content ourselves here with a mere allusion. A great many symbols and significations to do with the spiritual life and, above all, with the power of intelligence, are connected with the images of 'flight' and 'wings'. The 'flight' signifies intelligence, the understanding of secret things and metaphysical truths. 112

J.E. Cirlot notes that,

[the] interpretation of the bird as symbolic of the soul is very commonly found in folklore all over the world. 113

He also says:

Generally speaking, birds, like angels, are symbols of thought, of imagination and of the swiftness of spiritual processes and relationships. They pertain to the Element of air and... they denote 'height' and - consequently - 'loftiness' of spirit. 114



We can add to the widespread occurrence of the bird as a spiritual symbol in folklore and religious belief, the fact of its persistence in the arts through to the present day: in such contemporary works as paintings by Georges Braque, Morris Graves and Jennifer Durrant, the sculpture of Brancusi, the poems of George Trakl and Robert Lax, and the music of Olivier Messiaen (where bird-song is often used in a highly spiritual context).

Hudson was certainly aware of the traditional significations involved in the image of the bird. In Adventures Among Birds he speaks of the terrible irony, that

the South Europeans, the Latins, who are supposed to be lovers of the beautiful and who are undoubtedly the most religious of all people, should have chiefly been responsible for the extirpation of bird-species in Argentina. He continues:

They have no symbol for the heavenly beings they worship but a bird. Their religious canvasses, illuminations, and temples, inside and out, are covered with representations of ibises, cranes, pigeons, gulls, modified so as to resemble human figures, and these stand for angels and saints and the third person of the Trinity. Yet all these people, from popes, cardinals, princes, and nobles down to the meanest peasant on the land, are eager to slay and devour every winged creature, from noble crane and bustard even to the swallow that builds in God's house and the minute cutty wren and fairy-like firecrest - the originals of those sacred emblematic figures before which they bow in adoration! 115

This symbolic dimension to the image of the bird must not be thought of as something detached from our actual experience of the creature itself - something merely 'added on' to it; rather, it is derived from certain basic aspects of the creature's being. Hudson points to more than one reason for its symbolic qualities. One is its beauty:

The bird itself is a thing of beauty, supreme in this respect among living forms, therefore... the symbol in art for all that is highest in the spiritual world. 116

Another is its 'intensity of life', as he calls it -

a life so vivid, so brilliant, as to make that of other beings, such as reptiles and mammals, seem a rather poor thing by comparison. 117

He also refers to the 'sudden revelation of wild life in its nobler aspect'

which the sight of 'the large bird seen in flocks and vast numbers' produces - a sense of sublimity, of the bird's 'glorious freedom and power and majesty'.<sup>118</sup> The sight of the bird flying also affects our sense of the things around it:

The soaring figure reveals to sight and mind the immensity and glory of the visible world. Without it the blue sky can never seem sublime. 119

The soaring capacity of the bird refers us quite obviously to what is probably the most important symbolic aspect of the bird-image: the transcendence of earthly bonds, the theme of 'ascension'.

The sight of birds in nature - even without the sublimity of massed numbers or of their flight - could seem to Hudson a vision of the paradisaical. In Far Away and Long Ago, he writes of the sight, in childhood, of three flamingoes:

I was amazed and enchanted at the sight, and my delight was intensified when the leading bird stood still and, raising his head and long neck aloft, opened and shook his wings. For the wings when open were of a glorious crimson colour, and the bird was to me the most angel-like creature on earth. 120

The bird as sign of a more perfect realm emerges in Adventures Among Birds, where Hudson tells an ancient mythic tale of the country of the dead, for the sake of the following comparison:

That vision of the sunlit, surprisingly white, yellow-billed ducks floating on the wind-rippled blue pool - for it was like a vision - had to be told; but how, unless I said that it was like a glimpse into some unearthly place where all things are as on earth, only more beautiful in the brighter atmosphere? My blue pool with white birds floating on it, in a spring-green field, blown on by the wind and shone on and glorified by the sun, was like a sudden vision, a transcript of that far-up country. 121

Edward Thomas recognized the role of the symbolic in Hudson's vision of the bird, when he wrote:

The skylark is to [Hudson] both bird and spirit, and one proof of the intense reality of his love is his ease in passing... out of this world into a mythic, visionary, or very ancient world. 122

The relation between the bird and the human being is given various play

in Hudson's writings, culminating in the figure of the bird-woman.

Hudson thought of bird-life as the ideal to which man, with his superior faculties, should approximate,

says Robert Hamilton.<sup>123</sup> If it is difficult to see how they should go about doing so, it is still possible to see that this remark is not simply fanciful on Hamilton's part: we have the figure of Rima to show that.

(Perhaps one could simply indicate a desirable infusion of sublimity and of greater beauty into the form of human lives.) In more than one book, Hudson imagines himself turning into a bird-man, to experience what birds experience:

I would fly and live like them in the air, not merely for the pleasure of the aerial exercise, but also to experience in large measure the sense of sublimity. 124

And in another book he writes:

Standing on one great green hill [of the South Downs], and looking across vast intervening hollows to other round heights and hills beyond and far away, the wish is more than a wish, and I can almost realize the sensation of being other than I am - a creature with the instinct of flight and the correlated faculty; that in a little while, when I have gazed my fill and am ready to change my place, I shall lift great heron-like wings and fly with little effort to other points of view. 125

In Birds in Town and Village he weaves a haunting - if not exactly pretty - fantasy about a boy who, seeking escape from death, metamorphoses into a wryneck-like creature. The sombre colouring of this little story - which in the crazed behaviour of the boy suggests something of Abel's behaviour near the end of Green Mansions - evokes a negative aspect to the bird/soul symbolism; I will return to this aspect in regard to 'Marta Riquelme' (in Part Two, Chapter Five).<sup>126</sup> But on the whole, the suggestions of ontological intimacy between bird and human being are positive in nature. For example, Hudson writes of a West Sussex girl of about fifteen:

... when I spoke to her and she answered in a musical voice of so beautiful a quality, that was like a blackbird's voice and a willow-wren's, yet better than either, the rare sweet sound registered itself in my brain, and with it the face, too, became unforgettable. 127

The figure of Rima concentrates and fuses Hudson's concern with the bird as a spiritual symbol, with a feeling for the more hidden modalities of personal

being. Again, I will be discussing this in Part Two (Chapter Six).

Another being that Hudson saw as particularly potent with symbolic possibilities was the serpent - to which he for many years thought of devoting a book, an idea abandoned in favour of a few chapters on the subject in The Book of a Naturalist. Hudson was fascinated by snake-worship and serpent-myths.<sup>128</sup> He tried to trace those of the serpent's qualities that appealed to the 'mythical faculty' (to use his own expression):

First and foremost is the strength and lastingness of the impression produced by its strangeness, and its beautiful, infinitely varied, and, to the unscientific mind, causeless motions; its spectre-like silence and subtlety; its infinite patience and watchfulness, and its power to continue with raised head and neck rigid as if frozen to stone for a long period; and its wonderful quietude when lying day after day in sun or shade on the same spot, as if in a deep perpetual sleep, yet eternally awake, with open brilliant eyes fixed on whosoever regards it. A sense of mystery becomes inseparably associated with its appearance; and when habitually regarded with such a feeling, other qualities and faculties possessed by it would seem in harmony with this strangeness, and outside of the common order of nature: - its periodical renewal of youth; the power of existing without aliment and with no sensible diminution of vigour for an indefinite time; the faculty of fascination - a miraculous power over the ordinary lower animals; and the deadliness which its venom and the lightning-like swiftness of its stroke give it, and which is never exercised against man except in revenge for an insult or injury. To this inoffensiveness of the lethal serpent, together with its habit of attaching itself to human habitations, about which it glides in a ghostly manner, may be traced the notion of its friendliness and guardianship and of its supernatural power and wisdom; the belief that it was a reincarnation of a dead man's soul, a messenger from the gods, and, finally, the Agathodaemon of so many lands and so many races of men. 129

Hudson asserts that snake-worship has been prevalent

in every part of the earth inhabited by the serpent... at one time or another. 130

He is at pains to stress that similar structures of experience and thought occur - in such a matter as snake-worship, at least - throughout mankind.<sup>131</sup>

The serpent makes its most interesting appearance in Hudson in Green Mansions; I will turn to this in due course.

'... we ourselves are... mythopoeic,' Hudson wrote; and his sense of the mythic/symbolic extends from individual beings, aspects and zones to the

entire world itself, seen as living, and as supernatural.<sup>132</sup> This image of the world approximates to the idea of the anima mundi, the World-Soul - or the universal Soul, to use Hudson's term. Wilbur Long defines this idea as that of,

An intelligent, animating, indwelling principle of the cosmos, conceived as its organizing or integrating cause, or as the source of its motion; thus posited on the analogy of the human soul and body. 133

Beyond an ancestry in Romanticism and Transcendentalism, the notion can be traced back through Neoplatonism and Hermetic sources to Plato (in the Timaeus). Hudson was presumably familiar with the idea, if not from any earlier source, from the pseudo-Egyptian Hermetica ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus, written in the 2nd. to 3rd. centuries A.D.<sup>134</sup> Frances Yates writes that, in some of the Hermetic writings,

matter is [seen as being] impregnated with the divine, the earth lives, moves, with a divine power, there is no part of Nature which is not good for all are parts of God,

and this is the conception of the World-Soul which approximates to that which we generally find suggestions of in Hudson.<sup>135</sup> Hudson's sense of the World-Soul emerges in a passage in Afoot in England, where he speaks of

one of those rare days when nature appears to us spiritualised and is no longer nature, when that which had transfigured this visible world is in us too, and it becomes possible to believe - it is almost a conviction - that the burning and shining spirit seen and recognised in one among a thousand we have known is all of us and in all things. In such moments it is possible to go beyond even the most advanced of the modern physicists who hold that force alone exists, that matter is but a disguise, a shadow and delusion; for we may add that force itself - that which we call force and energy - is but a semblance and shadow of the universal soul. 136

Basically, the world being filled with 'soul', the notion of the anima mundi posits everything as a symbol; the supernatural order corresponds to, symbolically or analogically, and can be intuited through, the visible, material world. This concept - admittedly, never taken up and developed by Hudson, but only vaguely indicated by him - posits the universe itself as a

kind of 'cosmic psyche'. The more overtly mystical side of Hudson is only sporadically in evidence; but as I have shown, there are considerable grounds for speaking of his vision as fundamentally spiritual in its orientation.

## Chapter Seven

Hudson's vision is unable to sustain any real development of mystical perspectives regarding the soul - that form of personal being capable of orientation to the spiritual. Hudson's views on personal being are troubled and not always consistent; but from my consideration of symbolic and mystical perspectives upon the world, I will turn now briefly to questions of personal being in relation to immortality.

First of all, it must be said that Hudson felt that very little was actually known about the innermost aspects of our being. In A Hind in Richmond Park he wrote:

Like everybody else, I am like an infant in the night crying for the light, and with no language but a cry. And answer there comes none. For what do we know - and what do we know - what do we really and truly know about what a friend of mine will insist on calling our 'insides'? Meaning not our lights, livers and other organs, but that part of us where the mysteries are. 137

The mind itself - apart from any supernatural aspects of being - was in Hudson's view a realm still needing much exploration (for example, in regard to dream experiences), and he felt it should be looked at on its own terms, without reference to other aspects of being - as he said to Morley Roberts with regard to George du Maurier's novel about extra-ordinary dream-experiences, Peter Ibbetson. 'Of course,' he wrote,

there is a whole wonderful world or universe in man's mind which the deadly cut and dried psychologist doesn't know anything about, at all events he keeps away from it, though it is there to be explored by future Columbuses who are not afraid to venture into 'worlds unknown before'. 138

Hudson was not particularly consistent as a thinker - and his pronouncements at a theoretical level scarcely represent him at his best; the pressure of contemporary scientific thought - i.e. the ideological extension of scientific ideas, at a reductionistic level, into more general areas of

thought - appears to have sometimes driven him further into a sceptical position than at other times, and he would often take refuge in a humanistic subjectivism, which can be seen as a lapse in the quality of his thought and vision. So we unfortunately find him sinking his hopes, at times, in the vistas of the mind (taken in and for itself) and the explanatory force of its unknown aspects:

... I have long been convinced that there is nothing in this dim spot which men call earth, perhaps nothing in the entire universe, more marvellous than the mind in its secret doings; also that all the wonderful things, the apparitions, visitations and revelations, new and old, the messages and tidings of strange happenings in other worlds than ours, and in other states of being, are all, all, all to be found, if properly looked for, in this same well-nigh unexplored wilderness of the mind. 139

Hudson's writings - as I have shown - contain much in the way of intuitions of the spiritual in nature; it would be straightforward reductionism - something Hudson resists in other instances - to 'explain' these purely in psychological terms. But Hudson's instances of epiphany neither involve nor provoke spiritual ascent, in any real sense; they are 'glimpses', never followed through; and certainly never taken up into any active conviction about the soul's eternal life. Regarding the latter, Denis Shruballs writes:

Hudson's perplexity had been symptomatic of his age during which science and religion appeared to be in conflict; when he accepted Darwin's evolutionary doctrine he sacrificed his cherished hopes for individual salvation on the altar of science. 140

He remained troubled, however. As Ruth Tomalin says:

He dismissed with scorn the trite consolation of those who, never having lived in his sense of the word, could look on death as a deliverer; but among friends he would persistently and wistfully discuss the chances of personal immortality. The balance of evidence, he felt, was on the side of 'immortality in the race by transmitted influence', but not of personal survival after death.... 141

Tomalin's account presumably draws upon the testimony of Hudson's friend, Charles A. Hall, as it paraphrases certain things he says; Hall maintains that,

Hudson was agnostic as far as man's survival of bodily death is concerned, but he was too big in mind to deny the possibility, even if remote. 142



John T. Frederick holds that there is in Hudson's work 'a sense of a measure of personal immortality'.<sup>143</sup> Certainly, there is a fragmented sense of survival which can be seen in certain passages. At its simplest and least supernatural, this pertains to the difference that other human beings - those who have died - make to the way we experience the world: the dead, he says,

are not wholly, irretrievably lost, even when we cease to remember them, when their images come no longer unbidden to our minds. They are present in nature; through ourselves, receiving but what we give, they have become part and parcel of it and give it an expression. As when the rain clouds disperse and the sun shines out once more, heaven and earth are filled with a chastened light, sweet to behold and very wonderful, so because of our lost ones, because of the old grief at their loss, the visible world is touched with a new light, a tenderness and grace and beauty not its own. 144

Elsewhere he seems to reach towards a less straightforward notion of perdurance and of intermingling with nature. In Afoot in England he writes:

The knowledge that my individual life is but a span, a breath; that in a little while I too must wither and mingle like one of those fallen yellow leaves with the mould, does not grieve me. I know it and yet disbelieve it; for am I not here alive, where men have inhabited for thousands of years, feeling what I now feel - their oneness with everlasting nature and the undying human family? The very soil and wet carpet of moss on which their feet were set, the standing trees and leaves, green or yellow, the rain-drops, the air they breathed, the sunshine in their eyes and hearts, was part of them, not a garment, but of their very substance and spirit. 145

This feeling leads him into the idea that there may be some ghostly perdurance in or through the elements; he reports experiences of a sense of this, which are treated soberly enough. In Hampshire Days he writes of the people buried in ancient barrows:

... they were there with me in the twilight on the barrow in crowds, sitting and standing in groups, and many lying on their sides on the turf below, their heads resting in their hands. They, too, all had their faces turned towards Beaulieu. Evening by evening for many and many a century they had looked to that point, towards the black wood on the horizon, where there were people and sounds of human life. Day by day for centuries they had listened with wonder and fear to the Abbey bells, and to the distant chanting of the monks. And the Abbey has been in ruin for centuries, open to the sky and overgrown with ivy; but still towards that point they look with apprehension, since men still dwell there, strangers to them, the little busy eager people, hateful

in their artificial indoor lives, who do not know and who care nothing for them, who worship not and fear not the dead that are underground, but dig up their sacred places and scatter their bones and ashes, and despise and mock them because they are dead and powerless. 146

The passage suggests musing or fantasy, in as much as we have to ask how does Hudson know about their experience and attitudes? But the air of certainty with which he presents this picture also suggests some basis in experience - though what it might be, we can only guess. In Birds and Man he writes of experiencing the sensation of Gilbert White's presence in the graveyard at Selborne:

It began to seem to me that he [i.e. White] who had ceased to live over a century ago, whose 'Letters' had been the favourite book of several generations of naturalists, was, albeit dead and gone, in some mysterious way still living.... Perhaps there is some truth in the notion that when a man dies he does not wholly die; that is to say, the earthly yet intelligent part of him, which, being of the earth, cannot ascend; that a residuum of life remains, like a perfume left by some long-vanished, fragrant object; or it may be an emanation from the body at death, which exists thereafter diffused and mixed with the elements, perhaps unconscious and yet responsive, or capable of being vivified into consciousness and emotions of pleasure by a keenly sympathetic presence. At Selborne this did not seem mere fantasy. ... there was a continual sense of an unseen presence near me. It was like the sensation a man sometimes has when lying still with closed eyes of some one moving softly at his side. I began to think that if the feeling and sensation lasted long enough without diminishing in strength, it would in the end produce something like conviction. And the conviction would imply communion. Furthermore, between the thought that we may come to believe in a thing and belief itself there is practically no difference. 147

Hudson's experience obviously wasn't quite strong enough for him to totally commit himself to what was suggested by it - and to which the Hampshire barrow experience may have been akin; i.e. the notion of a surviving psychic residue. This in itself, however, is a poor cousin at best to any developed idea of immortal life, which Hudson, as we have already seen, could not bring himself to affirm. That his own experience, as attested in various passages quoted in this chapter, went quite some way to affirming such a thing, can be suggested in the following way. A capacity for spiritual experience - for spiritual life - is markedly evident in Hudson's writings, and with this capacity belongs the possibility of a continuity of existence

beyond the event of death. As Ian T. Ramsay emphasized, the terms immortality and unending life tell of

a situation we know now which is characteristically distinctive in being more than spatio-temporal. 148

John Hick has written appositely on this general matter:

Each [human] body is an individual physical organism occupying a separate volume of space. The mind or soul is closely related to the body, being known to us as embodied mind, an aspect of a psycho-physical individual. But mind is also related to spirit... which is supra-individual, the presently unconscious unity of humanity or perhaps even of created life as a whole. 149

In as much as Hudson does give us instances of spiritual experience, in terms of epiphany in nature and of mythopoeic/symbolic images that reveal something of the supernatural, Hick's statement has some bearing upon the perspectives disclosed through Hudson's work. The capacity for spiritual life remains, however, in that work, a residual, or fractured thing - the development of which could only be indirect and spasmodic, in that it could never be directed towards an open, full commitment to the eternal life 'within' personal being.<sup>150</sup> This remains, in my view, a limitation in Hudson; and an index of a kind of his relation to the thought of his time.

## Chapter Eight

The issue of Hudson's relation to certain ideologies of his time is worth pursuing because the way the paradisial or spiritual appears in his writing - persistent, yet elusive or fractured - can be aligned with his response to these tendencies.

In particular, it is worthwhile looking at his relation to a major aspect of that contemporary thought, the evolutionism of Darwin and his followers; my specific concern is with the obstacle Darwinism posed to religious faith.

In The Book of a Naturalist, Hudson writes:

One day [as a youth] an elder brother, on his return visit from travel in distant lands, put a copy of the famous Origin of Species in my hands and advised me to read it. When I had done so, he asked me what I thought of it. "It's false!" I exclaimed in a passion, and he laughed, little knowing how important a matter this was to me, and told me I could have the book if I liked. I took it without thanks and read it again and thought a good deal about it, and was nevertheless able to resist its teachings for years, solely because I could not endure to part with a philosophy of life, if I may so describe it, which could not logically be held, if Darwin was right, and without which life would not be worth having. 151

This 'philosophy' was that of the world having a design, which directly and homogeneously reflected the beneficence of a Supreme Being.<sup>152</sup> Darwin's suggestion that his conception of evolution constituted a more impressive sense of design to the universe than that formerly held, Hudson felt 'does not bear examination'.<sup>153</sup> Hudson remained haunted, like Darwin, by the 'darker' side of nature. Guy Davenport remarks that

Darwin sat in black vastation, contemplating the god, or void, he could never decide which, that allowed to evolve from the innocent matter such horrors as the tapeworm, the syphilis spirochaete, the poliomyelitis virus. 154

Hudson records similarly disturbing phenomena - difficult to reconcile with the notion of a uniformly beneficent design - amongst insect-life:

[Wasps do] not, like spiders, ants, dragon-flies, tiger-beetles, and other rapacious kinds, kill their prey at once, but [paralyze] it by stinging its nerve centres to make it incapable of resistance, and [store] it in a closed cell, so that the grub to be hatched by and by should have fresh meat to feed on - not fresh-killed but live meat. (...) ... the larvae of the Icheumonidae [feed] on the live tissues of the caterpillars in whose bodies they have been hatched. 155

To such facts of biology and natural history, the dependence of Darwinian evolutionary theory upon chance added another obstacle to the sort of unmediated, monolithic control or guidance by God posited by certain theological thinkers. But perhaps most importantly, the continuity of the various species of creatures - along a diversity of family-branches - posited by evolution made the distinction between the human race and the animals, and humanity's claim to a distinctive status (most particularly, involving immortality), appear difficult - or impossible - to maintain.

That the Darwinian doctrine of evolution should have had a powerful negative effect on contemporary religious life says a good deal about the state of belief as much as the doctrine itself - and its persuasive force. Nineteenth century thinking about the relation between God and nature had come to be dominated by 'natural theology', which saw that relation in direct, unmediated, simplistic terms:

Where Luther and Calvin had held that God's purposeful control of nature is not overtly visible to man, the 'natural theologians' were by the early nineteenth century very confident in the power of man's reason to discover unambiguously within the biological order the beneficent plan of God's wisdom. 156

'Natural theology' also held to a belief in the immutability of the species - founded on a literalist interpretation of Genesis, i.e. that God created each species for once and for all time. The doctrine of the evolution of species, and the notion that humankind evolved from, and has kinship with, the lower animals, then, had a powerfully damaging effect on 'natural theology'.<sup>157</sup> However, as Paul Amos Moody says:

Wise churchmen like St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas early recognized that [the first] chapters [in Genesis], while expressing

important religious truths concerning the Creator, should not be regarded as literal history. 158

At this point I will give a brief account of the Darwinian position, with some of the more immediate objections to it. As Moody expresses it,

Reduced to its essentials, natural selection results from the cumulative action of all forces tending to ensure that individuals possessing one genetic constitution shall leave larger numbers of offspring than will individuals possessing some other genetic constitution. 159

Darwin himself wrote:

Can it... be thought improbable, that variations useful in some way to each being in the great and complex battle of life should occur in the course of many successive generations? If such do occur, can we doubt (remembering that many more individuals are born than can possibly survive) that individuals having any advantage, however slight, over others, would have the best chance of surviving and procreating their kind? On the other hand, we may feel sure that any variation in the least degree injurious would be rigidly destroyed. This preservation of favourable individual differences and variations, and the destruction of those which are injurious, I have called Natural Selection, or the Survival of the Fittest. 160

These differences or variations of one individual to another come about by chance, i.e. accidentally; natural selection is the mechanism or law by which one chance variation survives and another perishes; it is thus responsible for the historical development, in biological terms, of the diverse species - the more complex species evolving from the simpler.

Darwin... was the first to develop consistently the idea that the evolutionary series of organisms was a tree of genealogical descent; related forms branching off from common parents, some forms ending in extinction, and others surviving to possess living descendents in various parts of the earth. 161

This included the doctrine of modern man's development from monkeylike ancestors (or, from ancestors held in common by modern man and modern monkey):

[Darwin] tried to show how all of man's characteristics might be accounted for in terms of the gradual modification of anthropoid ancestors by the process of natural selection.... He insisted that human moral and mental faculties differ in degree rather than in kind from the capacities of animals, among which there are the rudiments of feeling and communication. Man's own existence, hitherto considered sacrosanct, was thus brought within the sphere of natural law and analyzed in the same categories applied to other forms of life. 162

W.R. Thompson has pointed out the speculative and rhetorical nature of Darwinism. As he writes:

That natural selection directs the course of evolution Darwin could not prove by an appeal to facts.... He was able to show from factual examples that there is a great destruction of individuals in nature and to indicate some of the causes of this destruction; but he had little detailed evidence to offer concerning the action of natural selection. 163

Thompson emphasizes the imaginary basis of Darwin's examples in support of natural selection.

Darwin did not show in the Origin that species had originated by natural selection; he merely showed, on the basis of certain facts and assumptions, how this might have happened, and as he had convinced himself he was able to convince others. 164

The role of interpretation is much more fundamental and problematic than conceded by Darwin and his more dogmatic followers. 'As we know,' says Thompson,

there is a great divergence of opinion among biologists, not only about the causes of evolution but even about the actual process. This divergence exists because the evidence is unsatisfactory and does not permit any certain conclusion. 165

Where Darwinism saw the mechanistic principle of natural selection, together with chance variations, as the sole operational principle of evolution, Hudson argued for the existence of more vitalistic factors:

Like [Samuel] Butler and [Henri] Bergson, Hudson rejected the idea so popular among nineteenth-century biologists, of the mechanical adaptation of organisms to their changing environment. Rather, most is accomplished through a super-abundance of vital energy, an urge to realise one's potentialities, and, particularly among the more advanced forms of life, the guidance of the intelligence. He was convinced, for example, that with birds, intelligence is, in most instances, the directing 'principle of life, supplementing and modifying habits to bring them into closer harmony with the environment, and enlivening every day with countless little acts which result from judgement and experience, and form no part of the inherited complex instincts'. All faculties and forms acquired through the co-ordination of inner with outer forces are, after careful winnowing, transmitted by the various agencies of inheritance to the generations that follow, occasionally changing or evolving them into new organic forms, with new patterns of behaviour. 166

Hudson's critical attitude towards orthodox, mechanistic Darwinism led him into a defence of the Lamarckian and Butlerian position, including the

notion of the inheritance of acquired characteristics. We can note here, as an indication of his distance from Darwinian orthodoxy, his impassioned defence of Butler to Morley Roberts:

Minimize what Butler did as much as you like, it was he and not Herbert Spencer or anyone else who smashed the Darwin idol and finally compelled the angels of science to creep cautiously in where the jeered fool had rushed - and led the way. Darwin's glory is that he compelled the world to listen to the doctrine of transition - Butler's that he brought the Darwin cult to an end. 167

In another letter to Roberts he writes:

You don't seem to know that Butler has come into his own and that he has influenced thought more than any other writer of the last half of the 19th. century. And also that the scientists, who have been so much influenced by him, cheerfully conceal the facts.... I wish you would read Butler. You couldn't help admiring his acute reasoning and splendid independence. 168

Hudson's exaggerated idea of Butler's importance - 'he has influenced thought more than any other writer of the last half of the 19th. century' - can be understood in relation to Hudson's approval of Butler's Lamarckism.<sup>169</sup> He writes of Butler's work in relation to its explanation of

the secret of the fact and marrow of the transmission of acquired characteristics.... 170

In another letter we can see a confirmation of Hudson's belief in Lamarckian principles:

I see that in [Dr. Walter Kidd's] new work Initiative in Evolution (1920) he says:- 'Initiative in animal evolution comes by stimulation, excitation and response to new conditions and is followed by repetition of those phenomena until they result in structural modifications transmitted and directed by relation to the law of genetics: a series of events which agree with Neo-Lamarckian principles'. That is pure Samuel Butler; and even as Darwin's 'greatness' consists in his 'vast accumulation of facts' which compelled the world to listen to his story of Evolution... so Butler's 'greatness' consists in compelling the masters of science to drop their Darwin... and go back to Lamarck. 171

Jean Baptiste Lamarck - whose biological theories preceded those of Darwin - believed

that within each creature there was an inner force which operated continuously for the improvement of the species. If this force were not impeded in any way, it would lead to a perfectly linear series of creatures, a continuously ascending chain of beings from simple unicellular organisms up to man. ... the body of zoological facts known



to him forced Lamarck to recognize that the chain of beings was not fully continuous in nature, and he brought in his theory of the inheritance of acquired characteristics to explain the deviations from the linear scale. 172

This inner driving force or power, operating in such a way as to bring about increased organic complexity, Lamarck related to the action of certain 'subtle', invisible bodily-fluids.<sup>173</sup> Lamarck defined such a 'nervous fluid', in his Philosophie zoologique (1809), as:

A subtle substance, remarkable for the rapidity of its movements and receiving little attention because it cannot be directly observed, collected, nor experimentally examined; a substance of this character is the very strange and wonderful agent that nature employs for producing the muscular movement, feeling, inner emotions, ideas, and acts of intelligence, which many animals are able to carry out. 174

(The idea of an inner driving force - an immanent purposiveness - was later to be extended by the American scientist Edward Cope in such a way that it came to be seen as 'a spiritual force akin to the activity of the human mind'.)<sup>175</sup> Lamarck states in the Philosophie zoologique that when

the movement of the [nervous] fluids in the very supple [bodily] parts which contain them... is accelerated, the fluids modify the cellular tissue in which they move, open passages in them, form various canals, and finally create different organs, according to the state of the organization in which they are placed. 176

Through their power to modify organisms, these 'nervous fluids' can be linked as an idea with aspects of the other major component of Lamarck's doctrine - the notion of acquired characteristics. This entails (to quote from Arthur Koestler):

improvements in bodily structure, skills, habits, or ways of life, which the parents acquire through their efforts to cope with their environment, to adapt to its conditions and exploit the opportunities it offers. In other words, these 'acquired characteristics' are progressive changes which correspond to the vital needs of the species, and which, according to Lamarck, are transmitted to the offspring through the channels of heredity. Each generation would thus derive some benefit from the struggles and exertions of its forbears by direct bodily inheritance (and not merely indirectly through imitative learning from its elders). 177

It can be seen that Lamarck's ideas of evolution emphasised purposiveness both through the notion of an innate force tending towards always greater

complexity - a thesis restated by vitalistic philosophers in terms of a 'vital force' at work in nature - and through the doctrine of acquired characteristics which gave to individual effort a purposeful function in terms of the development of the species. It should be stated straight away that the doctrine of inheritance of acquired characteristics - to say nothing of the existence of Lamarck's subtle fluids - has never found much support in terms of evidence.<sup>178</sup> It remains that the concern for purposiveness in Lamarckism appealed to someone like Hudson because of the inability of Darwinism to fulfil the intuitions - and no doubt the deeply human need - of some sort of teleological principle. It did this in a localised way, without invoking a monolithic concept of beneficent design, which Darwinism had served to undermine. I think it legitimate to propose that for many of Hudson's contemporaries any attempt to link purposiveness with a personal Deity fell into the category of discredited dogma. The inadequacies of 'natural theology' and the rhetorical or persuasive force of mechanistic evolutionism as a powerful ideology - working with legitimate doubts and problems concerning spiritual issues and resolving them in a reductionistic and equally inadequate way - are both to blame here. In Hudson's case, perhaps the vulnerable age at which he first became aware of Darwinism and its threat to religious belief played a role, at a personal level, in his subsequent inability to answer the insistent claims of spirituality which are apparent in his writings, with any commitment to religious faith as such. As far as evolution went, he had to find another way of affirming purposiveness, and Lamarckism was the answer. That the way the theory supposedly worked, was unsupported by sufficient evidence (and probably unsupportable), is of course a great barrier to its usefulness - but a barrier which Hudson never saw, and hence never reckoned with.

Although there existed certain thinkers such as Asa Grey and Alfred

Russel Wallace who sought to combine the main tenets of evolutionism with an openness to spiritual or religious perspectives, on the whole the thrust of Darwinian thought tended to block off an approach to the supernatural; whereas the more vitalistic and purposive orientation of Hudson's Lamarckian beliefs could better support or align itself with an openness towards the supernatural. Seeing the supernatural in or through the natural and the personal was distinctly difficult in relation to the Darwinian account of nature and the person; especially when Natural Selection, as a mechanistic explanation of the process of evolution, was allied - in the work of influential writers like T.H. Huxley - to a thorough-going reduction of all forms, states or levels of existence to the physiochemical level. This reductionistic emphasis can be exemplified, as Roger Ebbatson notes, in Huxley's

1868 lecture on 'The Physical Basis of Life', which argued that life was simply a combination of oxygen, hydrogen, nitrogen and carbon, and that the concept of the soul or spirit was a delusion. 179

(In one of its alliances, Darwinism even became the basis of a socio-political doctrine of 'the survival of the fittest'.)<sup>180</sup> Hudson's rejection of physiochemical reductionism is indicated in his retort to Morley Roberts:

[Your contention is probably] that life is a mode of motion or that we are composed of so many ounces of water and salt, carbons and so on, and that's all there is about it. And if any person asks you, how do you (a handful of ashes) know anything about it, you can reply that you have already discovered and told them the secret of the universe and they mustn't ask more questions, mustn't worry their ashes about it! 181

In contradistinction to a reductionistic account of existence, Hudson maintained a notion of some sort of intelligent principle in nature. In A Hind in Richmond Park, he speaks of:

That vaguely conscious something, force or principle, in nature, which we sometimes roughly name 'unconscious intelligence', a diffused mind in or behind nature which gives a sort of supernatural disguise to phenomena....

He also characterises it as:

an indefinable something in or behind nature, [a] formative principle, ever blindly feeling and struggling on towards a definite goal. 182

It is a mark of Hudson's anti-reductionism that he managed to maintain a sense of spiritual aspects of existence. As his friend Charles A. Hall remarked:

Although agnostic on the subject of immortality, he had a sense of spiritual values and, figuratively speaking, he stood awed in the presence of Infinite Mystery. 183

At the same time as possessing a 'sense of spiritual values', the absence of any firm religious belief made it impossible for Hudson to affirm the spiritual apart from that elusive and threatened disclosure of the paradisiacal which I have remarked upon throughout this Part of the thesis.

NOTES

1. Hugh Kenner, A Homemade World; New York, 1975, p. 94. Kenner discusses the development of natural description in literature on pp. 93-95.
2. Samuel J. Looker, 'A Study of W.H. Hudson'; William Henry Hudson: A Tribute, ed. Looker, p. 39.
3. Guy Davenport, The Geography of the Imagination, pp. 232, 236. See also the quotation from Agassiz on p. 238:  

Philosophers and theologians have yet to learn that a physical fact is as sacred as a moral principle.
4. Hudson, Nature in Downland; London, 1932, p. 13. (This edition of Nature in Downland is bound with the story 'An Old Thorn'.) Hereafter abbreviated as ND.
5. Hudson, The Book of a Naturalist; London, 1980, p. 189. Hereafter abbreviated as BN.
6. See BN (p. 195) where he writes approvingly of the poet who 'does not see a thing too well', i.e. according to the light of 'cold examination'. Obviously in this respect there is a considerable difference between Hudson and a scientist like Agassiz.
7. W.J. Keith, The Rural Tradition; Hassocks, 1975, p. 187. (He goes on to invoke Blake's distinction 'between those who see with and those who see through the eye'.) See also Robert Hamilton's emphasis on Hudson as 'a man of vision', seeing nature 'in the light of the spiritualized senses'. (W.H. Hudson, The Vision of Earth, pp. 1, 4.)
8. BN, pp. 15-16.
9. BN, pp. 20-21.
10. BN, p. 21.
11. BN, pp. 23-24.
12. ND, pp. 61-63.
13. ND, pp. 90, 91.
14. ND, pp. 98-99.
15. TLT, p. 62.
16. TLT, p. 66.
17. TLT, p. 67.
18. For Eliade, see above (Introduction, Section 3, p. 31 (fn. 63)).
19. His own comments predicate a more modest approach, which - as far as

his best work goes, at least - can be taken fairly lightly, I think:

Mine is the mental attitude of the naturalist, whose proper study is not mankind but animals, including man; who does not wish to worry his brains overmuch, and likes to see very many things with vision a little clearer than the ordinary, rather than to see a very few things with preternatural clearness and miss all the rest.

(ND, p. 91.)

20. Other examples would be the sort of phenomena often disclosed in dreams; as well as in more uncommon experiences - none of which is specifically relevant to Hudson, except in so far as it may bear resemblances to the mythopoeic strain in his work - such as ecstasies, visions (in the sense of, e.g. prophetic visions), and certain types of 'schizophrenia'.
21. MBB, p. 212. (Letter of Jan. 1st. 1919.) (Roberts' commentary on Hudson's interest in occult phenomena - see pp. 212-13 - imputes his own more sceptical feelings about the supernatural to his friend in a rather too generous manner.)
22. MBB, p. 227. (Letter of March 2nd. 1918.) The comment is somewhat surprising, in as much as other passages in Hudson indicate a lingering concern with some form of post-mortem survival, as we shall see in Chapter Seven.
23. See Hudson's A Hind in Richmond Park; London, 1922, pp. 54-55. Hereafter abbreviated as HRP.
24. HRP, pp. 40-41. He relates a similar experience on pp. 41-42.
25. HRP, pp. 47-48.
26. HRP, pp. 46-47.
27. John T. Frederick, William Henry Hudson; New York, 1972, p. 26.
28. Ibid, p. 119.
29. Richard E. Haymaker, From Pampas to Hedgerows and Downs: A Study of W.H. Hudson; New York, 1954, p. 158.
30. W.J. Keith, The Rural Tradition, p. 12. See also ibid, p. 175; and HRP, p. 130.
31. Edward Thomas, A Literary Pilgrim in England; London, 1937, pp. 186-87.
32. Edward Garnett, 'A Note on Hudson's Spirit'; TLT, p. vii.
33. Hudson, Birds and Man; London, 1901, p. 308. Hereafter abbreviated as BM.
34. BM, pp. 304-05.
35. W.J. Keith, The Nature Tradition, p. 188.
36. Ibid, p. 180.

37. BN, p. 150.
38. BM, pp. 6-7.
39. BM, p. 8.
40. John T. Frederick, William Henry Hudson, p. 67.
41. ND, pp. 4-5. This is not of course empathetic in the strict sense, where empathy refers to what occurs between conscious beings.
42. HRP, pp. 184-85.
43. This idea has much in common with Martin Heidegger's Being and Time, and with the phenomenological notion of the lebenswelt - the 'life-world', i.e. the world as it is lived (in) by us.
44. Hudson, Hampshire Days; London, 1980, p. 33. Hereafter abbreviated as HD.
45. Hudson, The Land's End; London, 1926, pp. 14-15. Hereafter abbreviated as LE. Keith remarks on occasions of sentimentality and pathetic fallacy in Hudson (The Rural Tradition, p. 185).
46. The 'argument' is merely regressive; where does the expressive quality of the blue sky come from? (The passage in question occurs in BM, pp. 277-79.)
47. Hudson, Adventures Among Birds; London, 1924, p. 143. Hereafter abbreviated as AAB.
48. HRP, pp. 131-32.
49. HRP, p. 233.
50. I will, however, just note another example of this homocentric subject-ism, where Hudson prefers the beautiful sight of something to the life of the thing, e.g. the sight of a soaring heron when pursued by a falcon, to the heron's safety. (BN, pp. 103-04.)
51. HRP, pp. 33-34.
52. Quoted, from an unspecified letter, in Tomalin, W.H. Hudson, p. 125.
53. BN, p. 224.
54. BM, p. 29.
55. BN, pp. 193-94, 195.
56. Simone Weil, Gravity and Grace; tr. Emma Craufurd; London, 1972, p. 108.
57. Walter de la Mare, Pleasures and Speculations; London, 1950, pp. 63-64.
58. Ibid, pp. 53, 59. Ezra Pound also speaks of Hudson's 'special moments' (Hudson himself used this phrase in The Naturalist in La Plata; London,

- 1929, p. 8); comparing them to the Japanese haiku-poems in which a moment of illumination is conveyed imagistically, in a highly compressed form. (Selected Prose 1909-1965, p. 402.)
59. Walter de la Mare, op. cit., p. 51.
  60. Ibid, p. 61.
  61. George Evans, 'Perspective / For August', Scout (Autumn 1982), (no pagination).
  62. Virgil Ierunca, 'The Literary Works of Mircea Eliade', Myths and Symbols, ed. Joseph M. Kitagawa and Charles H. Long; Chicago and London, 1969, p. 347. It is worth noting, with regard to Ierunca's remark, that the notion of apparent non-differentiation doesn't hold for all of Eliade's fiction; his short novel The Old Man and the Bureaucrats is explicitly concerned with interventions of a fantastic or miraculous kind.
  63. See Hudson's poem 'The Visionary' (TLT, pp. 256-57), which is precisely about the 'apparent [non]-difference between the sacred and the profane'. By 'epiphany', I mean that illumination through which the spiritual is made manifest, as stated in my Introduction (section 1, p. 9).
  64. TLT, p. 97 The title of this book refers to his concern with 'small things'.
  65. Hudson, Afoot in England; London, 1924, pp. 223-24.
  66. See FALA, where he writes of animism as 'the sense of the supernatural in nature' (p. 202).
  67. TLT, pp. 335-36.
  68. LE, pp. 285-86.
  69. I shall discuss his opinions about perception (or experience) and writing a little later (in Chapter Five of this Part of the thesis).
  70. W.H. Hudson, Afoot in England, pp. 66-67.
  71. Symbolism should not be confused with allegory - a mechanical form of intellectual invention, generally dealing with elaborate and disguised, but rationally explicable, meanings. Hudson distinguished between the symbolic and the allegorical - but using a different nomenclature, where mythic is opposed to symbolic in the sense that (to use my choice of nomenclature) the mythic/symbolic is opposed to the allegorical. The distinction he makes, just the same, is on a somewhat crude basis, in as much as he fails to see that myth - or symbolism - is variously primitive, variously sophisticated - as a comparison between, say, Polynesian and Greek myths, or Australian Aboriginal myth and the mythic aspects of Hinduism, would reveal. He writes:
 

... symbolism does not exist among barbarians and savages: it comes in only when the intellect has progressed sufficiently far to



become enamoured of subtleties.

(BN, pp. 170-71.)

72. LE, p. 316.
73. LE, p. 194.
74. BM, p. 217.
75. Stephen Bann, 'Brice Marden: From the Material to the Immaterial'; Brice Marden: Paintings, Drawings and Prints 1975-80 (texts by various authors); London, 1981, p. 14.
76. Space and form do contain colour but only as a vehicle for its manifestation - not as a limit to its expressive effect. So we may feel at least, when colour is at its most intense, or most singular.
77. ND, p. 193.
78. HD, pp. 154-55.
79. LE, p. 214.
80. ND, pp. 178-79. Hudson's rejoinder is that life continues, with the following generation.
81. HD, pp. 19-20.
82. BN, p. 302.
83. I must remark his initial welcoming of the First World War - which he saw as preferable to the stagnant and staid gentility of civilization in Europe before the war. However, the death in action of his friend Edward Thomas made him regret his enthusiasm. Hudson's admirers tend to see that enthusiasm as an aberration, and as atypical. See Samuel J. Looker, 'A Study of W.H. Hudson', William Henry Hudson: A Tribute; ed. Looker, p. 25.
84. For the story of the Chichester owl, see ND, pp. 233-37.
85. LE, pp. 54-55.
86. HRP, pp. 174-75.
87. LE, pp. 220-21.
88. LE, pp. 221-22.
89. LE, p. 222.
90. See pp. 223-24 of LE, where he writes of a similarly terrible vision, of 'nature as a person', and states: 'If there be nothing but this mechanical world, and if the pure materialist even in spite of his materialism should invent for himself or imagine a god, it would be such a one as I beheld on that windy night'.

91. I will be looking at Hudson's presentation of human evil, with reference to such works as Green Mansions, El Ombú, and 'Dead Man's Plack', in Part Two.
92. See Roger Ebbatson, Lawrence and the Nature Tradition: A Theme in English Fiction 1859-1914; Hassocks, 1980, p. 11.
93. Ibid, p. 17.
94. Ibid, pp. 17, 18.
95. Elémire Zolla, The Uses of Imagination and the Decline of the West; Ipswich, 1978, p. 32.
96. Ibid, p. 32.
97. This is a view which can be found in Ruskin, as well as in the Romantics. (See William Vaughan, German Romanticism and English Art; New Haven, 1979; Chapter Two, 'The Mind of Art'.) In The Queen of the Air, Ruskin speaks of living things as 'natural myths', 'living hieroglyphs', 'the dark sayings of nature'. He says that natural things can be  
     the one repellent to the spirit of man, the other attractive to it, in a quite inevitable way, representing to him states of moral evil and good, and becoming myths to him of destruction or redemption, and, in the most literal sense, 'Words' of God.  
 (The Queen of the Air; London, 1899, pp. 81, 78.)
98. MBB, p. 259. (Letter of March 12th. 1920.)
99. HRP, pp. 166-67.
100. BM, pp. 19-20.
101. Hudson, The Naturalist in La Plata, p. 8. See also ND, pp. 142-43, for another instance of this view.
102. MBB, p. 221. (Letter of Feb. 10th. 1919.) The irony in this lies, of course, in the aestheticism which Morris was tied to in his poetry, and his crafts - despite his reaching outside the practice of art into other fields. See also Hudson's remarks, at the end of HRP (pp. 314-15), on the need to find a way of expressing beauty and emotion beyond art.
103. HRP, p. 323.
104. HRP, pp. 308-09.
105. LE, pp. 275-76.
106. Guy Davenport, The Geography of the Imagination, p. 160.
107. TLT, p. 136.
108. TLT, p. 147.
109. BD, p. 164.

110. For example, we find them in Novalis' novel Henry von Ofterdingen, Runge's paintings (such as 'The Hülsenbeck Children'), and more recently, Pavel Tchelitchew's painting 'Cache-Cache'.
111. Mircea Eliade, Patterns in Comparative Religion; tr. Rosemary Sheed; New York, 1976 (especially pp. 303, 324). A contemporary source of information about vegetation mythologies, to which Hudson could have had access, is Sir James Frazer's The Golden Bough, which appeared in twelve volumes between 1890 and 1914 (with a supplementary volume appearing much later).
112. Mircea Eliade, Myths, Dreams and Mysteries; tr. Philip Mairet; London, 1968, pp. 105-06.
113. J.E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols; tr. Jack Sage; 2nd. ed., London, 1978, p. 27.
114. Ibid, p. 28.
115. AAB, p. 37.
116. AAB, p. 40.
117. FALA, p. 177.
118. AAB, p. 41.
119. AAB, p. 93.
120. FALA, p. 67.
121. AAB, p. 114.
122. Edward Thomas, In Pursuit of Spring; London, 1914, p. 249.
123. Robert Hamilton, W.H. Hudson: The Vision of Earth, p. 28.
124. LE, p. 60.
125. ND, p. 27.
126. See Hudson, Birds in Town and Village; London, 1924, pp. 46-53.
127. ND, p. 125.
128. See, for example, his references to various serpent-myths in BN, p. 171.
129. BN, pp. 166-67. Hudson uses the phrase 'mythical faculty' in various places, e.g. p. 200 of the same book.
130. Ibid, p. 161. See also FALA (p. 185) where he speaks of:  
 that sense of something supernatural in the serpent which appears to have been universal among peoples in a primitive state of culture and still survives in some barbarous or semi-barbarous countries, and in others, like Hindustan, which have inherited an ancient civilization.

131. BN, pp. 161-65.
132. ND, p. 23.
133. Wilbur Long, Entry ('World-Soul') in Dictionary of Philosophy, ed. Dagobert D. Runes; Totowa, 1977, p. 338.
134. For Hudson's enthusiasm for Hermes, see MBB, pp. 324-25. (Letter of Dec. 28th. 1921.)
135. Frances A. Yates, Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition; London, 1978, p. 22. In an alternative Hermetic conception, the material world is viewed much more pessimistically, as impregnated with evil; something of this is also reflected in Hudson through the phenomenon of 'negative' epiphany.
136. Hudson, Afoot in England, pp. 64-65. I will note the phrase 'almost a conviction' - because Hudson's ability to hold firmly to spiritual beliefs had been riven by the materialism of his day. The interesting thing is the insistence of the spiritual in his writings in spite of obstacles to 'conviction'.
137. HRP, p. 38.
138. MBB, p. 182. (Letter of Jan. 10th. 1918.)
139. HRP, p. 228.
140. Denis Shruballs, W.H. Hudson: Writer and Naturalist, p. 93.
141. Ruth Tomalin, W.H. Hudson, pp. 137-38.
142. Charles A. Hall, 'My Acquaintance with W.H. Hudson', in Samuel J. Looker (ed.), William Henry Hudson: A Tribute, p. 76.
143. John T. Frederick, William Henry Hudson, p. 126.
144. TLT, p. 205.
145. Hudson, Afoot in England, p. 86.
146. HD, pp. 39-40. Passages like this one about the barrow-people, have prompted the notion that Hudson felt an affinity with archaic or primitive races. Robert Hamilton writes: '... Hudson revealed that strange atavistic affinity with the primitive stages of individual and racial development....' (W.H. Hudson: The Vision of Earth, p. 132.) This is true, in as much as Hudson felt that (so-called) primitive peoples - like children - experienced 'a nearness to or oneness with nature', and identified with that feature of their sensibility. (BN, p. 164; see also HD, p. 37.) Hudson's contemporaries, or at least, the townsmen among them, were cut off from nature, in his view, and hence alien to him and to the primitive and archaic races. (HD, p. 37.) But his feelings of affinity seem to be limited to this feature; there is a condescension in his reference to 'inferior or savage races' in BN (p. 165), and he betrays little feeling for primitive (or, for that matter, Asiatic) cultures when he writes with evident disdain of 'savage' (and of Indian) music in HRP (pp. 245-46).

147. BM, pp. 298-300.
148. Ian T. Ramsay, Freedom and Immortality; London, 1960, p. 104.
149. John Hick, Death and Eternal Life; London, 1979, p. 450. For the relation of notions of psychic residues to parapsychology as a whole, and of parapsychology to the spirit (and the basis for differentiation involved), see Chapters Seven and Twenty (Part Three), and to a lesser extent Chapter Six (Part Four), of Hick. (This question is too involved to be gone into here. Basically, however, with regard to Hudson's work, 'immortal life' as such involves a further development of the capacity for spiritual life, or at the least an existence in which there is the eventual possibility of such a development, whereas Hudson's residual psychic life is, precisely, a residue of something, a reminder, of which one could expect nothing in the way of development.)
150. The experience of the spiritual in Hudson doesn't result in any theistic affirmation, either. In a letter to Roberts (Jan. 24th. 1917) he writes:

I wonder what [a parson of his acquaintance] would say if he ventures to question me on my religious beliefs some day and I should reply that I'm a 'religious atheist'.

Hudson's belief in a personal Deity, as such, had been broken in his adolescence by his inability to reconcile certain facts of existence with the notion of beneficent design - the crisis being brought to a head by his contact with Darwinism (see Chapter Eight of this Part). (All the same, Hudson retained an intuition of some intelligent principle in the Cosmos; as well as a sense of the supernatural.) In the letter to Roberts, Hudson continues:

The other day I was having tea with him [i.e. the parson] and we got talking about Mysticism, and I said that the mystics were all under a delusion.

(MBB, pp. 153-54.) What delusion? Presumably that of believing they had experience of a personal Deity - if their mysticism happened to be theistic. The mystical slant of some of Hudson's own writings, and his statement to Roberts in conversation, "we've all got some mysticism in us" (Morley Roberts, W.H. Hudson: A Portrait, p. 206), scarcely suggest a general disbelief in mystical experience per se; nor does his testimony (to R.B. Cunninghame Graham) of

the sympathy I have always cherished for the Mystics of all times and religions, who, if we have in us but a trace of their faculty, are able at times to take us out of this material world.

(W.H. Hudson's Letters to R.B. Cunninghame Graham, ed. Richard Curle; London, 1941, p. 86. Letter of October 21st. 1905.) Even Roberts - a man with decidedly sceptical tendencies - admitted a mystical strain in Hudson (op. cit., pp. 302-03), even if defining that mysticism in a particularly limited way (of a rather simplistic oneness with nature).

151. BN, pp. 214-15.
152. BN, p. 214.
153. BN, p. 215.
154. Guy Davenport, The Geography of the Imagination, p. 246.

155. BN, pp. 213-14, 216.
156. Ian G. Barbour, Issues in Science and Religion; London, 1966, pp. 83-84. It is presumably this model of design - monolithic, directly and homogeneously beneficent or purposeful in relation to all details of nature - which Hudson is rejecting when he writes to Roberts (MBB, letter of Dec. 1917, p. 175) that 'design in nature' is a 'superstition'. (See also the chapter on 'Bats' in BN, where he broaches the subject of errors in the evolutionary process.)
157. See Ian G. Barbour, op. cit., p. 84.
158. Paul Amos Moody, Introduction to Evolution; 3rd. ed., New York, 1970, p. 6.
159. Ibid, p. 412.
160. Charles Darwin, The Origin of the Species; London, 1956, pp. 80-81.
161. Stephen F. Mason, A History of the Sciences; rev. ed., New York, 1977, p. 418.
162. Ian G. Barbour, Issues in Science and Religion, p. 86.
163. W.R. Thompson, Introduction to Charles Darwin, The Origin of Species, p. x.
164. Ibid, p. xii.
165. Ibid, p. xxii.
166. Richard E. Haymaker, From Pampas to Hedgerows and Downs, pp. 197-98. The quotation from Hudson occurs in The Naturalist in La Plata, pp. 210-11.
167. MBB (letter of Jan. 2nd. 1920), p. 253. Hudson's attitude to Darwin in his later years would appear to show some difference from that which appears earlier on (although he was always critical of aspects of Darwin's work, as 'Music and Dancing in Nature' in The Naturalist in La Plata of 1892 shows). In Idle Days in Patagonia of 1893, he uses the epithet 'peculiar' in referring to Alfred Russel Wallace's theories with regard to man's origin - the acquisition of large brains, naked body, and the upright form - not through but in spite of natural selection....
- (Idle Days in Patagonia; Berkeley, 1979, p. 223). Hudson might have seen that Wallace's views contained a genuine intuition about the shortcomings of Darwinian thought in accounting for the development of the specific characteristics of Homo sapiens through the mechanism of natural selection. His Lamarckian/Butlerian sympathies show a greater degree of freedom from the spell of Darwinian ideology than is evinced by this passage.
168. MBB (letter of July 21st. 1919), p. 240.
169. Roberts remarks that, besides this,

Hudson's admiration for Samuel Butler was chiefly founded on Butler's intense dislike for anything in the shape of orthodoxy in science....

(MBB, p. 242.)

170. MBB (letter of Feb. 20th. 1921), p. 292. (My italics.)
171. MBB (letter of Feb. 14th. 1921), pp. 288-89.
172. Stephen F. Mason, A History of the Sciences, p. 343.
173. See Hugh Eliot, Introduction to Jean Baptiste Lamarck, Zoological Philosophy: An Exposition with Regard to the Natural History of Animals; tr. H. Eliot; London, 1914, p. lxviii.
174. Jean Baptiste Lamarck, ibid, p. 314.
175. Stephen F. Mason, A History of the Sciences, p. 425.
176. Jean Baptiste Lamarck, op. cit., p. 2. I should add that there is no evidence of Hudson's interest in the idea of these fluids.
177. Arthur Koestler, The Case of the Midwife Toad; London, 1975, pp. 16-17.
178. The work of the biologist Paul Kammerer is the most interesting experimental research to be cited in support of the thesis of the inheritance of acquired characteristics; but the details of that work remain problematic. See Arthur Koestler's The Case of the Midwife Toad, which is an account of Kammerer's work.
179. Roger Ebbatson, Lawrence and the Nature Tradition, pp. 19-20.
180. 'Social Darwinism' drew a rebuttal from Peter Kropotkin; in his book Mutual Aid: A Factor in Evolution (1902) he observes that co-operation exists in nature as a factor which must be set over against the struggle for survival. (Kropotkin attested to the existence of the concept of mutual aid in the work of his predecessor, Karel Federovich Kessler, who lectured on 'Mutual aid as a law of nature and the chief factor in evolution' in St. Petersburg on January 8th. 1880; this was subsequently published in the Trudy (Transactions) of the St. Petersburg Naturalist Society in 1880. See Kropotkin, Memoirs of a Revolutionist; tr. Nicholas Walter; New York, 1971, p. 498.) Of course, a belief in levels of existence also leads to the ethical or spiritual conclusion of the need to transcend the self-centred - and violent - implications of 'the survival of the fittest'.
181. MBB (letter of July 21st. 1919), p. 239. Elsewhere (HRP, pp. 105-06), Hudson speaks with scorn of the sort of scientists  
     who do not believe in what doesn't exist, they having first made  
     the rule that nothing exists which they can't explain or which  
     does not conform to natural laws known to them.
182. HRP, p. 55.
183. Charles A. Hall, 'My Acquaintance with W.H. Hudson', in Samuel J. Looker (ed.), William Henry Hudson: A Tribute, p. 77.

PART TWOChapter One

In this part of the thesis I will be dealing with Hudson's fiction; specifically, all those works of fiction which can be considered of lasting literary merit: The Purple Land, A Crystal Age, El Ombú, Green Mansions, and Dead Man's Plack and An Old Thorn. Some will be treated in more detail than others, depending on relative importance. Green Mansions will be treated in most detail, both because I believe it to be Hudson's most important work, and because it is susceptible to that sort of detailed treatment which could not be sustained - with the same degree of purpose, at least - for a slighter work like The Purple Land.

The fictional works which I have chosen to exclude from this discussion are Ralph Herne, Fan, and A Little Boy Lost - as well as the short story 'Pelino Viera's Confession' (although the latter will be referred to in passing).<sup>1</sup> The reasons are quite simple: first, none of these works has serious claims on lasting literary merit, and second, none of them (with the exception - to a limited degree - of 'Pelino Viera's Confession') can be seen as significantly embodying, or significantly adding to, the imaginative concerns of Hudson's fiction as a whole. Ralph Herne is best thought of as apprentice-work.<sup>2</sup> Edward Garnett remarked in 1905 that 'the re-publication of Ralph Herne would destroy any writer's reputation.'<sup>3</sup> Hudson himself said of it (in a letter to Garnett, June 1904):

I find the first half too poor - just the ordinary kind of story of a young man going abroad and his adventures and love affairs - rather tedious and even twaddly. The second half is better, but it isn't enough to make the tale worth republishing unless by some firm that produces a lot of stuff for the young and has a rather low standard. 4

Hudson was not given to praising his own work; but this is damning indeed.



(He did, eventually, let it be republished in the United States - it appeared in 1923 - but this was for the sake of the royalties which would accrue for the Society for the Protection of Birds.) Again, with Fan: The Story of a Young Girl's Life, written under a pseudonym and in a 'popular' vein contrary to the spirit of Hudson's talent (presumably for the sake of attempting to earn some much-needed money), it is worth quoting Hudson's own opinion. In a letter to Garnett, he says: '... it is useless to bother about [Fan] as it is no good.'<sup>5</sup> 'Pelino Viera's Confession', a story about black magic, suffers from slightness of conception. It was presumably added to Tales of the Pampas - along with the narrative poem 'Tecla and the Little Man' - as 'padding'.<sup>6</sup> A Little Boy Lost, a rather weak, stilted fantasy, comes into a special category, as children's fiction, and it would seem pointless to try to force a relation to Hudson's main works of fiction.<sup>7</sup>

In some respects, Hudson's work as a field naturalist and nature-essayist has led to an obscuring of his identity as a writer of fiction. To put this another way: the anchoring of Hudson's work to a 'nature tradition' which includes Gilbert White and Richard Jeffries, although certainly valid, can only make the fiction appear as a strange appendage to his nature essays. The best attempt to situate Hudson within this tradition is in W.J. Keith's excellent study of English 'nature writing', The Rural Tradition.<sup>8</sup> This approach has the merit of providing a fairly flexible framework for discussing the non-fiction in a sympathetic light. The fiction remains a problem - either one divorces it from the non-fiction, and tries to situate it in some alternative way, or else one isolates the theme of nature in the fiction and relates it to the non-fiction in that way. The latter approach is clearly unsatisfactory, as it stresses one of Hudson's fictional concerns at the expense of the others. An example of the former approach would be to set up a comparison of Hudson and R.B. Cunninghame Graham, on the basis of

their both being literary 'mavericks' - outsiders in terms of a supposed 'mainstream' - who wrote about South America and the gaucho life. Given also the mutual admiration and friendship that existed between the two writers, this might seem a worthwhile point of departure for discussing Hudson's fiction. But the comparison would not be significant enough. For a start, the concern with South America doesn't cover all of Hudson's fiction (nor does it Cunningham Graham's). But more importantly, they are, on the whole, simply very different sorts of writer. Although Hudson indeed said that Cunningham Graham's work was 'more refreshing and stimulating to [him] than all the other writers of the day', the fairly strict limits within which Cunningham Graham wrote are at least as noticeable as his strengths.<sup>9</sup> His fiction involves straightforward, rather anecdotal storytelling, with concentration on local detail (often of an exotic nature, stemming from his sojourns in Argentina and Arabia, in particular), filtered through a quizzical, curious, sceptical mind. These fictional sketches are certainly well-written, entertaining, and have considerable verve; but they contain little indeed of the poetic, tragic, or mythopoeic elements to be found in Hudson at his best.<sup>10</sup>

A writer with whom Hudson might be compared with greater reward, is Herman Melville. Hudson was a great admirer of Moby Dick; and as Ruth Tomalin says, he 'felt that Americans had been slow to appreciate [the book]'.<sup>11</sup> Tomalin perceptively comments that Green Mansions

recalls Melville's Moby Dick.... In each there is grandeur and mystery, a sense of search and discovery, a blend of realism and poignant metaphor. Neither reveals its secrets at once; the mind is slowly gripped by their beauty and originality, and both remain long in the memory. <sup>12</sup>

If Green Mansions is in some ways comparable to Moby Dick, it might also be suggested that Typee and Omoo perform a similar function in Melville's oeuvre to The Purple Land in Hudson's, standing as stories of youthful

adventure prefacing the later explorations of wonder and 'darkness'. Furthermore, this 'darkness' - ontological before it is moral - is as much the concern of Hudson in Green Mansions and El Ombú, as in Moby Dick, Pierre, The Piazza Tales, and Billy Budd, Sailor.<sup>13</sup>

Harold Beaver's characterization of Melville's 'romantic vision' as involving

the search for an absolute revelation in nature; the inflation of self; the fascination with dreams, with demonic possession, with self-sacrificing love -

suggests parallels with significant elements in Hudson - most obviously his concern with abnormal states of mind and with what I have termed epiphanies in nature.<sup>14</sup> Melville's mythopoeic concerns are an especially important part of his correspondence to Hudson. Beaver writes:

Mythopoeia itself, a layer upon layer of contrasting mythologies, is the driving fuse of Melville's heroics. His very theme is the mythopoeic imagination: the neurosis of man in usurping the ritual rôle of Gods; the trauma that converts the pretensions of an Ahab to a suicidal re-enactment of myth. 15

In Moby Dick the 'darkness' of Ahab's hubristic obsession is matched - paradoxically - by the whiteness of the object of his obsession, the White Whale. To Ahab, Moby Dick is the personification of evil itself:

"All visible objects, man, [says Ahab,] are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event - in the living act, the undoubted deed - there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there's naught beyond. But 'tis enough. He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him." 16

Even if Ahab is insane, his vision of the whale, with its twinned horrors of nothingness ('Sometimes I think there's naught beyond.') and malignity ('... an inscrutable malice...'), corresponds with the symbolic resonance the whale has for the sane protagonist of Moby Dick, Ishmael; and this

correspondence establishes the hunt for the whale as a negative Quest - a search for the supernatural in negative form. In discussing whiteness, Ishmael gives us the key to his own vision of the White Whale:

Is [the power of whiteness] that by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation, when beholding the white depths of the milky way? Or is it, that as in essence whiteness is not so much a color as the visible absence of color, and at the same time the concrete of all colors; is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows - a colorless, all-color of atheism from which we shrink? And when we consider that other theory of the natural philosophers, that all other earthly hues... ; all these are but subtle deceits, not actually inherent in substances, but only laid on from without; so that all deified Nature absolutely paints like the harlot, whose allurements cover nothing but the charnel-house within; and when we proceed further, and consider that the mystical cosmetic which produces every one of her hues, the great principle of light, for ever remains white or colorless in itself, and if operating without medium upon matter, would touch all objects, even tulips and roses, with its own blank tinge - pondering all this, the palsied universe lies before us like a leper.... And of all these things the Albino whale was the symbol. Wonder ye then at the fiery hunt? 17

In Green Mansions, Rima represents the beautiful, the good, and the true; and her death involves a symbolism of the paradisiacal being at the mercy, on earth, of destructive forces. The Indians who kill her are motivated by a sort of blind malignity, while Abel enters into a different kind of evil, a moral insanity. But there are indications in Hudson that evil is, as it were, written into the code of earthly existence, inscribed in the network of chance and necessity. The fate of Marta Riquelme, or of several of the characters in 'El Ombú', suggests that the evil that men do is only one side of the topology of evil; the question of why a particular person - such as the innocent Marta - should be the victim of specific shocks of fate, can very well lead to the idea that evil is an ontological category (as good is) before it is either a psychological or a moral category, that 'darkness' or evil is woven into the fabric of life as we know it. Hudson, like Melville, is concerned with a symbolic discourse in which 'darkness' plays an important part.<sup>18</sup>

It is the symbolic quality of Hudson's work which establishes it as mythopoeic; the way, that is, his narrations employ figures that have an opacity, an inexhaustibility, constituted through analogical implications.<sup>19</sup>

'The symbol', as Paul Ricoeur says,

... opens up and discloses a dimension of experience that, without it, would remain closed and hidden. 20

The disclosive power of symbolism gives it its value, and gives to the literature marked by its presence, a distinction or differentiation. It is largely by means of the symbolic resonances of Hudson's writing that we can set Hudson apart from a writer like Cunninghame Graham and link him with one like Melville. Ricoeur's exploration of the 'substructure of meaning' beneath myth and symbol, in terms of a confession of fault, stain, defilement, guilt, which reveals the bond between humankind and the sacred, is as relevant to the dread at the heart of Hudson's late fiction as it is to Ahab's blasphemous hubris in Moby Dick.<sup>21</sup> Confession performs an important narrative role in Green Mansions, 'Marta Riquelme', and 'Dead Man's Plack'; but as with Melville, the witnessing or relating, as distinct from confessing, of stain or fault, is also crucially important in Hudson's narratives. Furthermore, both Hudson and Melville go beyond the boundaries of confession in making 'darkness' ontologically prior to the actions of the human will. In Melville, the white whale symbolizes the twinned themes of malignity and terrifying nullity; in Hudson, fate - the fact or process of one thing (rather than another thing) coming-to-pass - reveals that 'darkness' in terms of the deformation or destruction of life (especially where that life is represented as innocent).

In stressing a symbolic dimension in Hudson's work, I would wish to posit a degree of continuity in his writing and to suggest that the fictional and non-fictional works participate - in varying degrees - in the unfolding or disclosing of this dimension. I have suggested, in Part One,

how certain symbolic categories can be seen in the nature-writings, with the Natural Paradise as a fundamental symbolic substructure. I have also mentioned the elusive quality of our experience or perception of this fundamental symbolic substructure; and suggested that the fiction provides a deeper exploration of this elusiveness, through an intersecting of the paradisiacal with a symbolism of 'darkness' or evil. Green Mansions is Hudson's outstanding exploration of these preoccupations; they receive their fullest and most compelling literary/imaginal statement in that work; whereas the stories 'El Ombú' and 'Marta Riquelme' - the most important of his other works of fiction - are concerned with 'darkness' in such a way as to override the paradisiacal or epiphanic side of Hudson's imaginal world.<sup>22</sup> Approached through the symbolic, then, the preoccupations in both the fiction and non-fiction can be seen as part of the same imaginal universe.

In giving some idea of the symbolic dimensions of Hudson's writings, it would scarcely be possible to find a better example than the figure of the bird-woman. Ruth Tomalin writes:

All his life Hudson was haunted by the idea of a mysterious bird-woman, benign or malevolent. A gaucho legend on this theme was the first of his short stories to be published [i.e. 'Pelino Viera's Confession']. Pelino Viera, the narrator, discovers that his wife is a sorceress. One night he secretly watches her transform herself into a great bird, then follows her to a coven and accidentally stabs her. She regains human form, but dies, and he is convicted of her murder, writing his account in prison while awaiting execution.... But the fantasy took a deep hold on his imagination. Traces of it appear in the reason he gave for his marriage - the charm of Emily's singing - and in his attacks on 'feathered women' who followed the fashion of wearing birds' wings or plumes. Rima in Green Mansions is first heard as a strange bird-voice; in 'Marta Riquelme' the transformation produces a climax of horror. 23

I have already written about the general symbolism of birds in Part One, Chapter Six; and I will be looking at the image or figure of the bird-woman when I discuss Green Mansions; but I can indicate here that when bird-symbolism is attached to the characteristics of personhood, what is involved is an emphasis on supernatural or spiritual qualities. Generally, as

J.E. Cirlot says,

wings symbolize spirituality, imagination, thought. (...) ... the form and nature of the wings express the spiritual qualities of the symbol. Thus, the wings of night-animals express a perverted imagination.... 24

The composite image, then, of woman and bird involves one or another orientation of the 'soul'.<sup>25</sup> Behind this image there is the symbolism of metamorphosis itself. In 'primitive' religion and myth - as Mircea Eliade has shown in Patterns of Comparative Religion - metamorphosis is a way of portraying renewal and continuity of life beyond finality, disruption, separateness. The symbolism of metamorphosis acquires a tragic and 'negative' dimension in Hudson's work, as we can see in the fate of Marta.<sup>26</sup> In relation to an actual metamorphosis, such as we find in 'Marta Riquelme', and also 'Pelino Viera's Confession', we are dealing with a negative symbol (we need only think of the siren amongst ancient symbols to see how the bird-woman could have negative connotations in traditional myth). Rima's fate in Green Mansions also gives to the image of the bird-woman a tragic character; but in this case it is a question of the 'positive' symbolism of the bird being employed to disclose or to emphasize qualities of personhood, and of existence in general; and in her fate we can, as I have written above, read the dominant fate (as Hudson saw it) of the paradisiacal in this life. If Simone Weil is correct in her assertion, that

The subject of art is sensible and contingent beauty discerned through the network of chance and evil.

- then Green Mansions may be seen, in a sense, as art that takes the subject of art as its subject; and it casts that subject in a deeply pessimistic light.<sup>27</sup>

Along with metamorphosis, and doubled-nature, Hudson deals in his fiction with epiphany in nature; the thematics of the Natural Paradise; 'vitality' as a partial or limited symbol of the spirit; place as the 'location' for an exploration of hidden modes of being; the punctured,

residual or elusive character of our experience of the supernatural; and, as remarked above, various 'dark' or 'negative' modes of being.<sup>28</sup> If this list is, in the main, familiar from my discussion of Hudson's characteristics in relation to his non-fiction, in Part One, it is because these concerns can be found at the basis of both fiction and non-fiction.

In the following chapters, after looking at some previous critical attempts to deal with the fiction, I will be discussing in turn each of Hudson's more important fictional works, in order of publication in book-form.



## Chapter Two

Before beginning my own examination of Hudson's fictional works, I will look very briefly at the attempts to deal with the fiction in the three full-length critical studies of his work by Robert Hamilton, Richard E. Haymaker, and John T. Frederick.

All three writers have tended to look upon Hudson as primarily a nature-essayist, and to give the fiction a subordinate rôle or status. As a reflection of this, they all devote comparatively little space to the fiction. (Haymaker especially gives over only a small part of his book to it.)

Hamilton is explicit in the way he denigrates the fiction in order to stress the virtues of Hudson as an essayist; Haymaker and Frederick also show a preference for the essays, or, at any rate, a tendency to see these as the major part of Hudson's oeuvre, though without playing off Hudson the naturalist and essayist against Hudson the novelist and short story writer.

Hamilton states:

The Romances, which are mainly of Hudson's earlier period, have a curiously artificial quality at times, and are laboured by contrast with the Essays. 29

He explains this in psychological terms (in relation to Hudson's narrators):

... it seems to me that a writer would not consistently employ the first person unless he desired to express some aspect of himself, and we may reasonably assume that the narrator of the Romances is, to some extent, Hudson. [Earlier in W.H. Hudson: The Vision of Earth] I alluded to certain inconsistencies in his character, and it is possible that in the Romances he gave vent imaginatively to those elements in him which he normally suppressed, and which only emerged occasionally in everyday life. But integration was destroyed in the process, with the result that the narrator of the Romances is unreal. The man who emerges from the Essays, the observing field naturalist, sensitive, compassionate, charming, very sane, and rather conventional, may not be the whole Hudson; but he is convincing. The narrator of the Romances, - a queer composite - primitive, emotional, passionate, cynical, pessimistic, self-absorbed - does not ring true either in himself or in the sentiments he expresses. The narrator of the Romances is a fantasy

self; hence his artificiality; for only the self built up in accordance with the highest part of a man, his rational nature operating through continual efforts of the will, is genuine. The fantasy self, whether moral or immoral, is bogus; and the attempt to express it imaginatively leads to strain, with the resultant artificial effect. 30

Hamilton's presuppositions are those of rationalistic humanism ('... only the self built up in accordance with the highest part of a man, his rational nature operating through continual efforts of the will, is genuine....'), and anything outside of its limits is cast into a limbo of the 'bogus', a non-genuine 'fantasy' realm. Given this attitude, it is not surprising that he fails entirely to understand - or even recognise - the symbolic nature of Hudson's work. One feels that only a naive realism would have satisfied Hamilton; and that Hudson is continually seen as falling short of this ideal - whereas in fact at his best he in various ways exceeds or transcends it. But the other ideas expressed in the above passage are equally suspect. I hardly feel that the priest-narrator of 'Marta Riquelme' or Nicandro of 'El Ombú' can be equated with Hudson; and if it may be possible to see something of Hudson in Abel, Smith, or Richard Lamb, it strikes me that we are on very shaky ground if we move from this possibility to an equation between these characters and some suppressed aspects of authorial selfhood.<sup>31</sup>

As I have indicated throughout Part One, there is an imaginal, symbolic order in which Hudson's writings participate, but which is served most strongly, deeply, and explicitly by certain of the fictional works. In contradistinction to Hamilton's notions of Hudson's works, I would say that the compass of the nature writings tends to be of a much more limited kind than that of the fiction, both in subject-matter and its general exploration of existence.

In Robert Hamilton's sketchy characterizations of the fiction, there is no attempt to deal with the material in any detail or depth. Rather, he is concerned to bring forth a judgement on the work as if the judgement -

unsupported by any real discussion - were the truly important thing. Of A Crystal Age - for example - he says:

The note of human tragedy, of the never-never land, of exile, and loss due to the folly and greed of modern man typified by Smith pervades the book, and along with the descriptions of nature, justifies it to some extent. But it lacks substance; and the love scenes and the Mother episodes are laboured and far too prolonged. 32

This characterization, furthermore, is odd; both because of the inadequacy of a term like 'the never-never land' to summarize the ambivalent projection of an Utopian idealism in A Crystal Age; and because Smith - for all his foolishness - is treated far more sympathetically in the novel (and is far more willing to attempt a distance from his 'modernity') than Hamilton's comment would suggest.

It must be stressed that Robert Hamilton lacks the sort of engagement which brings insight. For example, when he writes:

... the love scenes in the Romances - the cynical dallying of Lamb in The Purple Land, the sentimental amorousness of Smith in A Crystal Age, or the half crazed passion of Abel in Green Mansions - appear to be the work of a man who has experienced none of these things.

- it should be noted that none of these characterizations are apt.<sup>33</sup> To take one example, Abel's passion for Rima is intense, not 'half crazed'; in the latter part of the book, he becomes prey to irrational delusions - but to speak of his passion then as 'half crazed', when in fact he is insane, is just as inappropriate as it is in relation to the period before the crisis brought on by Rima's death and his complicity in the slaughter of Runi's tribe.

The redeeming feature of Hudson's fiction, for Hamilton, is its 'note of tragedy'.<sup>34</sup> He says:

I mean that tragedy is their supreme merit, and sets them apart from the Essays.... 35

Related to this tragic note is a 'dark emotion which was genuine'; and because of this, Hamilton admits that the fiction, at its best, takes us

'into a strange and haunting world of the imagination'.<sup>36</sup> Hamilton seems here to be convinced in spite of himself; although he still attempts to take this 'strange and haunting world of the imagination' back into conventional Aristotelian bounds by invoking a notion of tragic catharsis.

Richard E. Haymaker - although more sympathetic towards Hudson's fiction than Hamilton - also does little in the way of probing the imaginal depths of Hudson's works.

He comments on an apparent lack of concern with form; while praising the variety in 'tone' (to use his term) of the different novels and stories - including

the informality, ironic humor, and ebullience of The Purple Land [and] the studied elaborateness of A Crystal Age, the richly-wrought, wistful poetry of Green Mansions, and the noble simplicity and gravity of most of the short stories.<sup>37</sup>

He also praises the employment of nature for situating the emotions and personal being of Hudson's protagonists, whom he finds most convincing when they are 'those who draw their strength from the soil - peasants and Indians and gauchos', although he adds that 'with Rima, he was able to create memorably with only the eye of the imagination.'<sup>38</sup> He characterizes Hudson's writing as having

something of the texture of a Hawthorne or a Turgenev. It can absorb a considerable amount of detail without halting the movement of the story, and rise to lyrical intensity. It is impregnated throughout with the personality of a man looking at life freshly.<sup>39</sup>

Haymaker allows himself too little space to do justice to the fiction. He also has a tendency towards textually unfounded comments; for example, when discussing 'El Ombú', he states that 'gentle Valerio... though brought up amid luxury, embraced poverty because it brought peace of mind', whereas we are only told that his circumstances changed from luxury to poverty; again, he claims that Hudson identified Elfrida ('Dead Man's Plack') with elemental forces of nature - the fire in the hearth, the river Test, and the 'sea of rounded hills' on Salisbury Plain,

but in fact Hudson employs these images in terms of attraction, not identification.<sup>40</sup>

There is, however, a responsiveness and understanding in Haymaker's comments, on the whole, that I find largely missing in Hamilton. For example, after praising the rare intensity of Green Mansions, he writes:

... implicit in Rima's death is a tragic vision of the world as a whole. In the life of man, so exquisite a love as that between her and Abel cannot be more than a brief interlude. In the life of nature, much that is most admirable - especially the more ethereal elements - is continually being destroyed by the evil in the heart not only of man but of Nature herself. 41

The limitations of Haymaker's approach, however, are revealed in his failure to probe the more symbolic significances of details which he only notes, e.g. the use of avian imagery in relation to Rima. Nevertheless, Haymaker's final estimation of the fiction is worth quoting, as it shows the degree to which he recognises Hudson's achievement in this field:

... 'El Ombú' and 'Marta Riquelme' deserve to rank close to such masterpieces of the short story as 'Heart of Darkness' and 'The Death of Ivan Ilych'; The Purple Land belongs to a small but very select group; and Green Mansions is one of the best fantasies in our language. Most of Hudson's tales and novels... bring new material to literature and a new and strange beauty.... 42

The sketchiness of John T. Frederick's treatment of the fiction, together with his reliance on brief plot-summaries, and his tendency to see Hudson first and foremost as a naturalist and only secondarily as an imaginative writer, make his work on the novels and stories less than satisfactory. Having said this, there are a number of shrewd and knowledgeable comments. For example, he separates A Crystal Age from other Utopian romances of the same age, remarking that Hudson's book 'has not the slightest suggestion of the savage irony' to be found in Samuel Butler's Erewhon, and noting that unlike Edward Bellamy's Looking Backward which praises machinery as the means of humankind's social salvation, A Crystal Age is anti-mechanistic.<sup>43</sup> But looking at some of his other remarks about this book it

can be seen that he fails to penetrate Hudson's vision at all deeply. To begin with, he can find no way of locating the book in relation to the other fiction (except in regard to the expression of certain views or beliefs of the author's), calling it 'an anomaly in the whole body of his work'.<sup>44</sup> I will be attempting to discuss the novel in such a way as to counter such a characterization; for the moment, it is worth noting David Garnett's opposite judgement, that A Crystal Age is 'one of the strangest and most characteristic of Hudson's books'.<sup>45</sup> Frederick discusses 'the significance of A Crystal Age as expressive of Hudson's religious view and position', remarking:

Although the relatively limited critical writing about Hudson includes various attempts to define his religious position, with much employment of such terms as animism, Hudson's religion was actually relatively simple; it is clearly expressed in and through the whole body of his work. It was earth worship: reverence and sympathy for every form of life and for all living things, reverence for the earth itself as the source and sustainer of all life, and reverent acceptance of the conditions and limitations of the life of every creature. This religion is also that of the people of The Crystal Age [sic], as it is revealed through the imperfect and gradual perception of Smith.<sup>46</sup>

As my account of Hudson's world-view in Part One should make clear, this is too simplistic a conception; furthermore, it should be remembered that 'animism' was a favourite term of Hudson's - even if it acquired a somewhat idiosyncratic meaning with him, as I have noted (again, in Part One, Footnote 66); that 'earth-worship' is not, strictly speaking, a religion; and finally, that the people in A Crystal Age have a conception of Deity - something left out of Frederick's account.

The shortcomings of Frederick's account can also be seen in his discussion of Green Mansions, where he emphasises that we see Rima as Abel sees her -

Her uncanny ability to escape Abel's vision, her ability to travel through treetops, and her birdlike voice are inexplicable. But gradually, with Abel, we see the woman in her emerge....<sup>47</sup>

But the special interest of Rima is precisely in her ambiguous, complex, mysterious being; Frederick seems to want to collapse this into a concept of

'womanliness', that is, of a simpler, less ambiguously conceived 'humanity' than we actually have in the figure of Rima the bird-woman. I read this as misinterpretation and loss.<sup>48</sup>

As with Haymaker, Frederick's conviction that Hudson was primarily a nature-writer does not prevent him from expressing considerable admiration for some of the fiction. Of 'El Ombú' he writes:

The narrative - one of violence, death, insanity, and love - is perfectly controlled and integrated by the quiet, slightly formal, explicit style of the narrator. Its effect is one of massiveness; of intense human experience rendered only the more poignant by the narrator's consistent simplicity and understatement. Few works of fiction of comparable length, in English or in any other literature, equal it in essential power or in completeness of achievement. 49

'Marta Riquelme' he refers to as 'in some ways even more remarkable', calling attention to what he calls the consistency of its 'integrity of revelation', and to the intense projection of anguish in the story.<sup>50</sup> He praises the 'stylistic excellence' of Green Mansions as well as referring to such factors as 'its brilliantly rendered exotic background', its projection of an 'idealizing love' and 'the power and precision of the wholly human character of Abel'.<sup>51</sup> He adds:

It is Hudson's supreme dramatic expression of his recognition of the mystery of life: the mystery of death as an inseparable part of life, of all birth and growing and flowering, of all beauty, all happiness, and all achievement. 52

### Chapter Three

The Purple Land was originally published as The Purple Land that England Lost (1885); when he came to publish the revised version in 1904, Hudson wrote a 'Preface to the New Edition' in which he specified the revisions as

many small verbal corrections and changes, the deletion of some paragraphs and the insertion of a few new ones, [as well as the omission of] one entire chapter containing the Story of a Piebald Horse... reprinted in another book entitled El Ombú. 53

The Purple Land is the narrative of an Englishman's adventures in the Banda Oriental, 'the little republic on the east side of [the Plata river]'.<sup>54</sup> It is an episodic and anecdotal novel, a 'series of sketches and stories, in which the free though not easy life of the open road is captured'.<sup>55</sup> 'This novel,' writes Jorge Luis Borges,

is reducible to a formula so ancient that it can almost comprise the Odyssey; so fundamental that the name formula subtly defames and degrades it. The hero begins his wandering, and his adventures encounter him along the way. The Golden Ass and the fragments of the Satyricon belong to this nomadic, random genre, as do Pickwick and Don Quixote, Kim of Lahore and Segundo Sombra of Areco. 56

The improvised and even rambling nature of the narrative, in which Richard Lamb's 'adventures encounter him along the way' in Borges' ingenious phrase, contributes to the verve or vivacity of the book; the freedom from any sense of rigid or tight construction complementing the way Lamb wanders from one adventure to another, his search for work providing little more than an excuse for lively escapades. The vivacity of the book is, indeed, what most readers, I believe, will remember above all; and it is this quality of liveliness, of vivacious life, which, more than anything else, is the real subject of the book. The Purple Land provides a limited or partial sense of the spirit in its more 'primitive' or 'crude' aspect, i.e. as anima, breath or power of life, animating power, etc. This doesn't reside in Lamb



or any of the other characters or the Banda Oriental itself; rather they - in various degrees and ways - participate in it. The limited - restricted, flawed - nature of this as an image of the spirit can be seen, for example, in the violence which is indulged in. The flawed nature of seeing violence as an aspect of vitality, is congruent with Hudson's ambivalence towards violence in The Purple Land, for, as I shall point out later in this chapter, there are passages that condemn the excesses of bloodshed in the Banda. But the 'colourfulness' and freedom of the Banda Oriental, with violence as one of its aspects, is preferable (says Hudson) to a life in which civilized convention and comfort have brought about restrictions and losses of freedom.

O civilization, with your million conventions, soul and body withering prudishness, vain education for the little ones, going to church in best black clothes, unnatural craving for cleanliness, feverish striving after comforts that bring no comfort to the heart, are you a mistake altogether? ... Ah yes, we are all vainly seeking after happiness in the wrong way. It was with us once and ours, but we despised it, for it was only the old common happiness which Nature gives to all her children, and we went away from it in search of another grander kind of happiness which some dreamer - Bacon or another - assured us we should find. We had only to conquer Nature, find out her secrets, make her our obedient slave, then the earth would be Eden, and every man Adam and every woman Eve. We are still marching bravely on, conquering Nature, but how weary and sad we are getting! The old joy in life and gaiety of heart have vanished, though we do sometimes pause for a few moments in our long forced march to watch the labours of some pale mechanic seeking after perpetual motion and indulge in a little, dry, cackling laugh at his expense. 57

There are similar sentiments in A Crystal Age and Green Mansions; and if the opposition of nature and culture is problematic - at least as far as human life is concerned - in its invocation of anteriority, in The Purple Land Hudson is content to draw a picture of 'natural' life which centres upon this freedom and liveliness, and present it as fact. This can be seen in Lamb's changing ideas, towards the end of the book, about the British and the Purple Land that they lost:

I cannot believe that if this country had been conquered and recolonised by England, and all that is crooked in it made straight according to

our notions, my intercourse with the people would have had the wild, delightful flavour I have found in it. And if that distinctive flavour cannot be had along with the material prosperity resulting from Anglo-Saxon energy, I must breathe the wish that this land may never know such prosperity. 58

Along with the beauty of unspoiled nature, Lamb values the free, spontaneous human relations, unhampered by notions of social status, that he sees operative in the Banda:

The unwritten constitution, mightier than the written one, is in the heart of every man to make him still a republican and free with a freedom it would be hard to match anywhere else on the globe. The Bedouin himself is not so free, since he accords an almost superstitious reverence and implicit obedience to his sheikh. Here the lord of many leagues of lands and of herds unnumbered sits down to talk with the hired shepherd, a poor bare-footed fellow in his smoky rancho, and no class or caste difference divides them, no consciousness of their widely different positions chills the warm current of sympathy between two human hearts. How refreshing it is to meet with this perfect freedom of intercourse, tempered only by that innate courtesy and native grace of manner peculiar to South Americans! ... If this absolute equality is inconsistent with perfect political order, I for one should grieve to see such order established. 59

This opposing of natural sympathy, expression, freedom and equality to the rigidity of conventions, extends in Lamb's attitudes to an opposing of 'individual will, ... healthy play of passions', to a repressive political or moral code.<sup>60</sup> Lamb's attitudes reflect or articulate that verve and keenness which I have said is the very substance of the book.

It would be wrong to ignore the moral and idealistic orientation of this anima, as portrayed in Lamb's knight-errantry, and above all in the humane, generous, idealistic and noble figure of the revolutionary, Santa Coloma.<sup>61</sup> Despite vanity and other shortcomings, there is in Lamb a keen sympathy towards those he meets; and one can gather an idea of his better tendencies in his comments on the English settlers - a group of foolish layabouts - he meets:

... it always makes me uncomfortable to see young men drifting into intemperate habits, and making asses of themselves generally.... 62

But it is in relation to the hapless Demetria that Lamb reveals his most

noble aspect. Here his high-spirited taste for adventuring acquires a selfless, generous orientation. Lamb sojourns at an estancia near the Lomas de Rocha - an establishment in ruins, with an insane owner, who initially believes Richard to be his dead son, Calixto; his sorrowful daughter, Demetria; and Hilario, the villainous usurper of authority at the estancia, who intends forcibly marrying Demetria so as to inherit the family property. The eerie and tragic spirit which envelops the estancia to some extent adumbrates that of 'El Ombú'. 'The old half-ruined house' assumes, in the moonlight, 'a singularly weird and ghost-like appearance'.<sup>63</sup>

It seemed to me at that moment that I had somehow drifted into a region of mystery, peopled only by unearthly, fantastic beings. The people I had supped with did not seem like creatures of flesh and blood. The small, dark countenance of Don Hilario with its shifty glances and Mephistophelian smile; Demetria's pale, sorrowful face, and the sunken, insane eyes of her old, white-haired father, were all about me in the moonlight and amongst the tangled greenery. 64

Richard Lamb helps Demetria to escape from Don Hilario, taking her to Montevideo, and then, by ship, to Buenos Ayres.<sup>65</sup> The picturesque Santo Coloma is in the disguise of a tramp and travelling under the name of Marcos Marco when Lamb first meets him; and in disguise again when he last meets him, on board the ship to Buenos Ayres; his disguises are necessitated by his being hunted, as a revolutionary, by the authorities. Doña Mercedes, Dolores' mother, says, addressing Richard:

"You know nothing of the cruel wars we have seen and how our enemies have conquered only by bringing in the foreigner to their aid. Ah, señor, the bloodshed, the proscriptions, the infamies which they have brought on this land! But there is one man they have never yet succeeded in crushing: always from boyhood he has been foremost in the fight, defying their bullets, and not to be corrupted by their Brazilian gold." 64

General Santa Coloma's courage and incorruptibility are enlisted in a noble cause; adventurousness finds a direction, a purpose, which is essentially unselfish, in this remarkable figure. The idealistic spirit of Santa Coloma is also apparent in the tragic story he tells of his love for a girl named

Transita, beginning when she is a child around the age of eleven, and he a boy of fifteen:

"This child, playing with the waves, was like nothing I had seen before. I regarded her not as a mere human creature; she seemed more like some being from I know not what far-off celestial region who had strayed to earth, just as a bird of white and azure plumage and unknown to our woods, sometimes appears, blown hither from a distant tropical country or island, filling those who see it with wonder and delight." 67

What is believable here with Santa Coloma, in consideration of the way he behaves, becomes a mark of sentimentality in Richard Lamb; speaking apropos a girl named Margarita, he tells of his feelings for beauty in nature (which are quite believable) and his feelings for beauty in persons (which are more suspect):

I have always had a great love for the beautiful: sunsets, wild flowers, especially verbenas, so prettily called margaritas in this country; and beyond everything the rainbow spanning the vast gloomy heavens with its green and violet arch when the storm-cloud passes eastward over the wet sun-flushed earth. All these things have a singular fascination for my soul. But beauty when it presents itself in the human form is even more than these things. There is in it a magnetic power drawing my heart; a something that is not love, for how can a married man have a feeling like that towards anyone except his wife? No, it is not love, but a sacred ethereal kind of affection.... 68

Lamb's tendency towards carrying on flirtations with practically any attractive girl or woman he meets belies his comment about 'a sacred ethereal kind of affection'; and even if his marriage (which he keeps quiet about throughout his amorous adventures) does incline him towards keeping his flirtations within bounds, it does not stop them going far enough to be hurtful to at least one woman in the narrative (Dolores).

Lamb's flirtations provide Hudson with one source for the humorous element in the novel. The following passage occurs when Dolores has revealed her love to Richard:

Suddenly she raised her dark, luminous eyes to mine, anger and shame struggling for mastery on her pale face.  
 "Speak, Richard!" she exclaimed. "Your silence at this moment is an insult to me."  
 "For God's sake, have mercy on me, Dolores," I said. "I am not free - I have a wife." 69

Lamb's discomfiture is comic in this context because his deception has been foolish rather than wicked, and there is a patent absurdity about much of his behaviour - for example, he joins Santa Coloma's forces in a battle because he judges himself 'bound in honour' to do so, having 'bargained' with Dolores over a kiss!<sup>70</sup> The humour in The Purple Land can be pointed to as one element which goes to make up that feeling of vivacity I have remarked upon. Another, quite different, example of Hudson's humour from this book can stand as illustration -

I was greatly amazed at hearing the name of one of these youngsters. Such Christian names as Trinity, Heart of Jesus, Nativity, John of God, Conception, Ascension, Incarnation, are common enough, but these had scarcely prepared me to meet with a fellow-creature named - well, Circumcision!<sup>71</sup>

How much difference this element makes to a book like The Purple Land might be demonstrated simply and effectively, by noting that whereas the element is still strong in A Crystal Age, it is present only in the earliest and slightest of the stories in El Ombú (one of which was originally part of The Purple Land), and although it appears in Green Mansions, the gravity and tragedy of the latter part of that novel outweighs any comedy. The increasingly sombre quality of Hudson's imagination seems to minimize or exclude the comic element; or else to use it as a contrast - the more to emphasize the terrible end of Rima, and the terrifying state that Abel falls into. Again, there is little room for humour in the 'dark' world of 'Dead Man's Plack'. The amount of humour in The Purple Land - especially, the light-hearted quality of it - is one sign by which we recognise a particular human world: one which has not been overtaken by 'darkness', while yet acknowledging some of the more tragic aspects of life.

The events of The Purple Land are situated within a specific landscape which is a lived realm - a realm of emotions, cultural or spiritual perspectives, etc. In terms of Richard Lamb's life, the Banda Oriental is 'a place of pleasant and peaceful memories'.<sup>72</sup>

Those wild, troubled days in the Purple Land now seemed to my mind peaceful, happy days,

he says at the end of the book.<sup>73</sup> They are, at least, happy in contrast with the time that comes after that covered by the narrative - briefly, at the beginning of The Purple Land, Lamb outlines the bitter developments whereby his wife's father, enraged by their elopement to the Banda Oriental, separates them and has Lamb cast into prison. This time

was all black disaster. Three years of enforced separation and the extremest suffering which the cruel law of the land allowed an enraged father to inflict on his child and the man who had ventured to wed her against his will. 74

So, even this image of happiness and wild freedom which the Banda Oriental constitutes, exists for Lamb as a memory of the time before the black despair and pain that followed it. Hudson sets his image of the Banda in parentheses, by emphasizing at beginning and end of the narrative the disaster that overtakes Lamb; for this enjoyment of a wild and free existence in a beautiful land, which involves the imaging of anima, the animating current of life, is itself of an impermanent, elusive nature. At the same time, there is an ambivalence to the picture of the Banda; its beauty and its freedom are at risk in another sense; for while stressing its beauty, Lamb is concerned to point out the bloodshed, suffering and villainy in the land. Early in the book, he describes the Banda as being,

one of the fairest habitations God has made for man: great plains smiling with everlasting spring; ancient woods; swift beautiful rivers; ranges of blue hills stretching away to the dim horizon. And beyond those fair slopes, how many leagues of pleasant wilderness are sleeping in the sunshine, where the wild flowers waste their sweetness and no plough turns the fruitful soil, where deer and ostrich roam fearless of the hunter, while over all bends a blue sky without a cloud to stain its exquisite beauty? 75

But if there is some dim reflection of the Natural Paradise in this image of peace and beauty, the image is punctured a little further on. The people of the Banda, Lamb says, 'are on the eve of a tempest'.

The expected change and tempest is a political one. The plot is ripe, the daggers sharpened, the contingent of assassins hired, the throne of

human skulls, styled in their ghastly facetiousness a Presidential Chair, is about to be assaulted.... And we consider it right to root up thorns and thistles, to drain malarious marshes, to extirpate rats and vipers; but it would be immoral, I suppose, to stamp out these people [in power] because their vicious natures are disguised in human shape; this people that in crimes have surpassed all others, ancient or modern, until because of them the name of a whole continent has grown to be a byword of scorn and reproach throughout the earth, and to stink in the nostrils of all men! 76

This stress on socio-political evil is carried through as a theme through the figure of Santa Coloma, whose noble nature forms a contrast to the political conditions with which he is engaged; and it is restated near the end of the book in a significant way, when Richard says:

"Do you know, Demetria, ... when the long winter evenings come, and I have plenty of leisure, I intend writing a history of my wanderings in the Banda Oriental, and I will call my book The Purple Land; for what more suitable name can one find for a country so stained with the blood of her children?" 77

The emphasis on violence and bloodshed is only a harbinger of the 'darkness' in the late fiction. What violence is contained in the narrative of The Purple Land is more-or-less taken in its stride. It might be said, metaphorically, that the 'purple' will change to 'black' in terms of the later consciousness of evil, suffering and destruction.

As I have stated above, the consciousness and expression of that elusive Paradise which I take to be central in Hudson, is also dimly present in The Purple Land. This visionary or epiphanic experience of landscape is most deeply felt in a passage which it is worth quoting here at length, for it brings out this most important element of Hudson's writing very strongly:

At our backs rose the giant green and brown walls of the sierras, the range stretching away on either hand in violet and deep blue masses. At our feet lay the billowy green and yellow plain, vast as an ocean, and channelled by innumerable streams, while one black patch on a slope far away showed us that our foes were camping on the very spot where they had overcome us. Not a cloud appeared in the immense heavens, only low down in the west purple and rose-coloured vapours were beginning to form, staining the clear intense whity-blue sky about the sinking sun. Over all reigned silence; until, suddenly, a flock of orange and flame-coloured orioles with black wings swept down on a clump of bushes hard by and poured forth a torrent of wild joyous music. A strange performance! screaming notes that seemed to scream

jubilant gladness to listening heaven, and notes abrupt and guttural mingling with others more clear and soul-piercing than ever human lips drew from reed or metal. It soon ended; up sprang the vocalists like a fountain of fire and fled away to their roost among the hills, then silence reigned once more. What brilliant hues, what gay fantastic music! were they indeed birds or the glad winged inhabitants of a mystic region, resembling earth, but sweeter than earth and never entered by death, upon whose threshold I had stumbled by chance? Then, while the last rich flood of sunshine came over the earth from that red everlasting urn resting on the far horizon, I could, had I been alone, have cast myself upon the ground to adore the great God of Nature, who had given me this precious moment of life. For here the religion that languishes in crowded cities or steals shame-faced to hide itself in dim churches flourishes greatly, filling the soul with a solemn joy. Face to face with nature on the vast hills at eventide, who does not feel himself near to the Unseen? 78

This passage also swiftly suggests the symbolic connotations of the bird, which, as I have pointed out in Part One, Chapter Six, is an enduring theme in this writer. The bird is employed by Hudson - in relation to traditional symbolism - as a sign of the paradisial; and as I will show, the combination of bird symbolism with the imagery of personal being results in Hudson's most complex and haunting evocation of the paradisial: the figure of Rima in Green Mansions.



Chapter Four

In The Purple Land, Richard Lamb states:

It is often said that an ideal state - an Utopia where there is no folly, crime, or sorrow - has a singular fascination for the mind.... [But] I hate all dreams of perpetual peace, all wonderful cities of the sun, where people consume their joyless monotonous years in mystic contemplations, or find their delight like Buddhist monks in gazing on the ashes of dead generations of devotees. The state is one unnatural, unspeakably repugnant: the dreamless sleep of the grave is more tolerable to the active, healthy mind than such an existence. 79

A Crystal Age (1887) is an Utopian romance and to some extent it represents a polar opposite in Hudson's imaginal economy to The Purple Land and Richard Lamb's consciousness. In the Preface to the 2nd. edition of A Crystal Age, published in 1906, Hudson wrote that 'Romances of the future' derive from

a sense of dissatisfaction with the existing order of things, combined with a vague faith in or hope of a better one to come. 80

A Crystal Age, then, is an ideal projection, of a new pastoral society - or as Hudson puts it, 'a dream and picture of the human race in its forest period'.<sup>81</sup> At the heart of this picture is a life of transcendence, dependent upon sublimation; the denizens of the Crystal Age have achieved a communal life of crystalline purity, with much emphasis on spirituality, art, appreciation of nature, and 'brotherly' and 'sisterly' affection, and this at least partly derives from the sublimation of physical passion.

Hudson wrote to Edward Garnett:

The sexual passion is the central thought in the Crystal Age: the idea that there is no millenium, no rest, no perpetual peace till that fury has burnt itself out, and I gave unlimited time for the change. 82

The Crystal Age society is based on selective breeding, as a guard against overpopulation and against what Chastel, the Mother of the House, calls the breeding of 'degenerate beings'.<sup>83</sup> As Ruth Tomalin explains,

Hudson based his 'ideal' community on the beehive, headed by a single fertile couple, the Father - promoted from drone to king - and the revered Mother. The rest are workers; not sexless, but with all sexual instinct in abeyance. 84

Hudson's treatment of this theme is scarcely one of straightforward advocacy; but it is worthwhile noting his later rejection of this 'solution' to what is referred to above as an 'affliction', in the Preface to the 1906 edition of the novel:

Alas that in this case the wish cannot induce belief! For now I remember [a] thing which Nature said - that earthly excellence can come in no way but one, and the ending of passion and strife is the beginning of decay. 85

The landscape of A Crystal Age is one of calm beauty, the haven of this pastoral Utopia and the ideal setting for a cult of nature. Nothing could be more remote from, say, the geography of 'Marta Riquelme', and the spiritual climate or region which that narrative portrays - as we shall see later in this study. The protagonist of A Crystal Age, Smith, is an outsider who strays into this 'crystal' domain in a highly mysterious (not to say unconvincing) style: he falls thirty or forty feet down a ravine while on a botanical expedition, and wakes in a pit 'situated in a gentle slope at the top of the bank!' - and in a future age.<sup>86</sup> Smith's impressions of his surroundings bring us, at the beginning of the novel, an idea of the beauty of the landscape and prepare us for the importance of nature in the novel and in the beliefs or attitudes of the Crystal Age people.

The hills among which I had been wandering were now behind me; before me spread a wide rolling country, beyond which rose a mountain range resembling in the distance blue banked-up clouds with summits and peaks of pearly whiteness. Looking on this scene I could hardly refrain from shouting with joy, so glad did the sunlit expanse of earth, and the pure exhilarating mountain breeze, make me feel.... A more tranquil and soul-satisfying scene could not be imagined: the dear old mother earth was looking her very best; while the shifting golden sunlight, the mysterious haze in the distance, and the glint of a wide stream not very far off, seemed to spiritualise her 'happy autumn fields', and bring them into a closer kinship with the blue over-arching sky. 87

The father of the house reveals the attitude of the Crystal Age to nature

when he says:

"... more than [mundane] things are the precious moments when nature reveals herself to us in all her beauty." 88

The house-members have a passion for viewing a certain flower called the rainbow-lily; rather like the traditional Japanese fascination with flower-viewing.<sup>89</sup> (Again, one can hardly imagine the characters of 'Marta Riquelme' indulging in flower-viewing.) Elsewhere in the book, Chastel speaks of "'the unseen spirit which is in nature, inspiring our hearts....'"<sup>90</sup> Smith also has some experience of the supernatural in nature, feeling 'a something proceeding from nature - phantom, emanating essence, I know not what', which, with its 'sacred presence', heals the tumult and suffering in his soul.<sup>91</sup>

The artifice and art of the Crystal Age people is in harmony with, and an extension of, their sense of natural beauty, and the transcendence which can be found through it. Hudson stresses - as a mark of the quality of mind involved - the nobility and sublimity of the artificial surroundings:

The hall was the noblest I had ever seen; it had a stone and bronze fireplace some twenty or thirty feet long on one side, and several tall arched doorways on the other. The spaces between the doors were covered with sculpture, its material being a blue-grey stone combined or inlaid with a yellow metal, the effect being indescribably rich. The floor was mosaic of many dark colours, but with no definite pattern, and the concave roof was deep red in colour. 92

Returning by the hall we went through a passage and entered a room of vast extent, which in its form and great length and high arched roof was like the nave of a cathedral. And yet how unlike in that something ethereal in its aspect, as of a nave in a cloud cathedral, its far-stretching shining floors and walls and columns, pure white and pearl-grey, faintly rounded with colours of exquisite delicacy. And over it all was the roof of white or pale grey glass tinged with golden-red - the roof which I had seen from the outside when it seemed to me like a cloud resting on the strong summit of a hill. 93

The house, as the dwelling of the family, is, in the father's words, "'the image of the world'" (and he continues:

"... we that live and labour in it are the image of our Father [i.e. God] who made the world...."). 94

As such, it is the image of a world instinct with beauty, nobility,

sublimity. The Crystal Age architecture would seem to express the world-view of its people less well than their arts - especially, their music.<sup>95</sup>

In a passage which I have already drawn upon in part, Chastel distinguishes for Smith the transformative character of art from the simpler appreciation of natural works which he is able to share with the people of the Crystal Age:

"There is a twofold pleasure in contemplating our Father's works: in the first and lower kind you share with us; but the second and more noble, springing from the first, is ours through that faculty by means of which the beauty and harmony of the visible world become transmuted in the soul, which is like a pencil of glass receiving the white sun-beam into itself, and changing it to red, green, and violet-coloured light: thus nature transmutes itself in our minds, and is expressed in art. (...) ... in all artistic work we commune not with blind, irrational nature, but with the unseen spirit which is in nature, inspiring our hearts, returning love for love, and rewarding our labour with enduring bliss." 96

Unfortunately the visual art that Hudson describes sounds conventionally and dully Victorian in character (I suspect that Hudson had, from all evidence, little sensitivity towards visual art); but the description of the music is quite different. Smith is asked to lead the evening's singing; and he affronts them with a rendition of 'The Vicar of Bray', in a passage marked by its successful humour (not all the humour in A Crystal Age is effective).<sup>97</sup> This forms a contrast with the extraordinary 'harvest melody' - as they call it; the description is worth quoting at some length, both because it conveys the spirituality of their art (and is an amazingly successful attempt to project an image of music at a future stage of development, to some extent invoking - for us, now - composers like Varése or even Ligeti and Penderecki), and because it is one of the more memorable passages of writing in a book which at times suffers from being prolix, sentimental, precious, awkward and even absurd.<sup>98</sup>

... the father, putting out one of his hands, touched a handle or key near him, whereupon one of the brass globes began slowly revolving. A low murmur of sound arose, and seemed to pass like a wave through the

room, dying away in the distance, soon to be succeeded by another, and then another, each marked by an increase of power; and often as this solemn sound died away, faint flute-like notes were heard as if approaching, but still at a great distance, and in the ensuing wave of sound from the great globes they would cease to be distinguishable. Still the mysterious coming sounds continued at intervals to grow louder and clearer, joined by other tones as they progressed, now altogether bursting out in joyous chorus, then one purest liquid note soaring bird-like alone, but whether from voices or wind-instruments I was unable to tell, until the whole air about me was filled and palpitating with the strange, exquisite harmony, which passed onwards, the tones growing fewer and fainter by degrees until they almost died out of hearing in the opposite direction.... Deeper, more sonorous tones now issued from the revolving globes, sometimes resembling in character the vox humana of an organ, and every time they rose to a certain pitch there were responsive sounds - not certainly from any of the performers - low, tremulous, and Aeolian in character, wandering over the entire room, as if walls and ceiling were honey-combed with sensitive musical cells, answering to the deeper vibrations. These floating aerial sounds also answered to the higher notes of some of the female singers, resembling soprano voices brightened and spiritualised in a wonderful degree; and then the wide room would be filled with a mist, as it were, of this floating, formless melody, which seemed to come from invisible harpers hovering in the shadows above.

Lying back on my couch, listening with closed eyes to this mysterious, soul-stirring concert, I was affected to tears.... 99

The affective and spiritual qualities of this music are brought home in a later passage, where Smith says:

... I sat there in the dark, wondering, as men will wonder at such moments, what this tempest of the soul which music wakes in us can mean: whether it is merely a growth of this our earth-life, or a something added, a divine hunger of the heart which is part of our immortality. 100

The concern with transcendence which the Crystal Age art represents, as well as the people's harmony with nature and their ethical uprightness, are distinctive enough to stand as a contrast to the civilization of Smith's - and Hudson's - own time. There is a persuasiveness to Crystal Age values, and to the way they are borne out in the life of the people, which tempts Smith greatly; but there is also, as I shall show, a significant gap between Smith and these people which he tries in vain to close.

It will be instructive to look first at the Crystal Age account of the shortcomings of the preceding civilization (i.e. the European civilization of Hudson's time). Early in the book, the father of the house makes a

speech in which he characterizes humankind of that time as drunk with hubris; humans, he says, became obsessed with knowledge for its own sake, "asking not whether it was for good and for evil", in the process losing "that better knowledge and discrimination which the Father [i.e. God] gives to every living soul...."<sup>101</sup>

"... like one who, forgetting the limits that are set to his faculties, gazes steadfastly on the sun, by seeing much they [became] afflicted with blindness. (...) ... in their madness they hoped by knowledge to gain absolute dominion over nature, thereby taking from the Father of the world his prerogative." <sup>102</sup>

By this arrogance, and this lack of orientation in their concern with knowledge - which reads to me like an implicit attack on the claims of humanistic rationalism - they condemned their civilization to destruction, 'long centuries' before the Crystal Age replaced it.<sup>102</sup>

Smith is clearly won over - in the main - by the people of the Crystal Age, and their values. For example, he says at one point:

... I was now able, I imagined, to appreciate the beautiful character of my friends, their crystal purity of heart and the religion they professed. <sup>104</sup>

The pastoral life he now lives, with manual labour a part of each day, contrasts favourably with the city-existence he had formerly lived.

It seemed to me now that I had never really lived before, so sweet was this new life - so healthy, and free from care and regret. The old life, which I had lived in cities, was less in my thoughts on each succeeding day; it came to me now like the memory of a repulsive dream, which I was only too glad to forget. <sup>105</sup>

With his pleasure in this new life, goes a feeling of justness about the destruction of the things characteristic of his own age. Indeed, the thought assailed him during his old life, that his civilization was doomed:

A little while, the thought said, and all this will be no more; for we have not found out the secret of happiness, and all our toil and effort is misdirected.... <sup>106</sup>

There is, however, a very real conflict between Smith and the lived-world of the Crystal Age; and this develops into the central theme of the

novel. The concern with vitality - in the larger sense of an intensity of lived relations, or of a vital force expressing itself in the world (not least, the world of human action) - which is central to The Purple Land, is scarcely abandoned in A Crystal Age. Rather, as passion, it is set over against the sublimated, crystalline, neuter purity of the house-members (except, that is, for Chastel, and, potentially, Yoletta). Smith's passion for Yoletta causes him continual anguish, as passion remains in abeyance for these people. Hence the extremity of his reaction when he discovers that Yoletta's true age is thirty-one:

... I sat down on a low stone at some distance [from Yoletta], with a stunned feeling in my brain, and something like despair in my heart. That she had told me the truth I could no longer doubt for one moment: it was impossible for her crystal nature to be anything but truthful. The number of her years mattered nothing to me; the virgin sweetness of girlhood was on her lips, the freshness and glory of early youth on her forehead; the misery was that she had lived thirty-one years in the world and did not... know what love, or passion, was! Would it always be so - would my heart consume itself to ashes, and kindle no fire in hers? (...) ... here I was, very much in love with Yoletta, who said that her age was thirty-one, and yet who knew of only one kind of love - that sisterly affection which she gave so unstingingly. 107

Later in the book when Yoletta expresses love for him, Smith is cast into 'a great despondence', feeling hers were 'words that simulated passion while no such feeling touched her heart'.<sup>108</sup> When the house-members go out to view the rainbow-lilies, Smith is the only one who doesn't join in - his passion for Yoletta (who has been shut up in the house as punishment for a misdemeanour) making it impossible for him to participate and be one with the others. Smith, in fact, cares for nothing above Yoletta; and because of his passion for her, 'a great, gaunt, man-eating, metaphorical wolf' of desolation follows him everywhere.<sup>109</sup> The 'demon of passion', 'ever increasing in power and ever baffled of its desire', is imaged by Smith as the cause of his projected tragedy:

... I would see myself as in a magic glass, lying with upturned, ghastly face, with many people about me, hurrying to and fro, wringing

their hands and weeping aloud with grief, shuddering at the abhorred sight of blood on their sacred, shining floors; or, worse still, I saw myself shivering in sordid rags and gaunt with long-lasting famine, a fugitive in some wintry, desolate land, far from all human companionship, the very image of Yoletta scorched by madness to formless ashes in my brain; and for all sensations, feelings, memories, thoughts, nothing left to me but a distorted likeness of the visible world, and a terrible unrest urging me, as with a whip of scorpions, ever on and on, to ford yet other black, icy torrents, and tear myself bleeding through yet other thorny thickets, and climb the ramparts of yet other gigantic, barren hills. 110

There is more than a suggestion here of the final part of Green Mansions in this sense of the desolating, 'dark' forces of human experience; and if the gravity and intensity of Green Mansions is not to be found in a realized form in A Crystal Age, it is still possible to speak of an advance from The Purple Land - in terms of a deepened acknowledgement of the more tragic aspects of life. The climax of Smith's despair over the disparity between himself and the Crystal Age people does, in fact, result in tragedy - although inadvertently. He reads in a book called Renewal of the Family that,

For the children of the house there could be no union by marriage; in body and soul they differed from me: they had no name for [sexual love].... 111

He falls into a despairing rage in which he wishes that he had the power to

shatter the sacred houses of this later race, and destroy them everlastingly, and repeople the peaceful world with struggling, starving millions, as in the past, so that the beautiful flower of love which had withered in men's hearts might blossom again. 112

Smith finds an elixir which he thinks is a cure for passion, and which he drinks for Yoletta's sake; it is, instead, a poison.

The irony of Smith's end is that it is needless; that is to say, he finds out too late that one man and one woman from the household are selected to become the parents of the next generation; and remembering things that Chastel has said to him, he realizes that he and Yoletta would have been this couple.

It is Chastel and Yoletta who achieve some sort of remarkable quality,



some liveliness, that distinguishes them from the others; in that they combine - Chastel in actuality, Yoletta in potentiality - vivacity and passion with that 'crystalline nature' of the others. (The father should, in theory, have this more memorable quality; but as the spokesman in the novel for the values of the Age, he becomes more of a mouthpiece much of the time than a character. Added to this, he is sanctimonious - although it is hard to say if Hudson intended him to appear so.) When he first sees Chastel, who is incurably ill, Smith says of her:

My very first glance at her face revealed to me that she differed in appearance and expression from the other inmates of the house: one reason was that she was extremely pale, and bore on her worn countenance the impress of long-continued suffering; but that was not all. She wore her hair, which fell unbound on her shoulders, longer than the others, and her eyes looked larger, and of a deeper green. There was something wonderfully fascinating to me in that pale, suffering face, for, in spite of suffering, it was beautiful and loving; but dearer than all these things to my mind were the marks of passion it exhibited, the petulant, almost scornful mouth, and the half-eager, half-weary expression of the eyes, for these seemed rather to belong to that imperfect world from which I had been severed, and which was still dear to my unregenerate heart. 113

Despite this assurance of her face being 'loving', and a later characterization of her possessing 'the keen insight and sympathy of a highly spiritualized nature', there is a haughtiness to Chastel - again, probably not intended as such by Hudson - that vitiates the image of her as a singularly ideal figure, in the conjoining in her nature of the crystal purity and spirituality of the other house-members with that quality of passion denied to them.<sup>114</sup>

Yoletta remains a potential, unrealized vehicle of this union of polarities; and Chastel fails to be fully convincing as an image of the ideal union. The others remain unmemorable - sanctimonious and lacking in vivacity in their one-sided spirituality. It seems to me that this points up something of the imaginal economy of W.H. Hudson's work, that 'spirit' in this novel is not convincing in its purely 'crystalline' aspects - whereas

another writer might have been able to convincingly portray a 'crystalline' spirituality as something valid, within its own terms and limitations. At this point in his writing Hudson is not able to create successfully a definite image for spirituality in terms of personhood; in fact, it will not be until the writing of Green Mansions that the shortcomings of the characterization of Chastel and the potentialities of Yoletta are made good in the figure of Rima.

Chapter Five

El Ombú is clearly one of Hudson's greatest artistic achievements; in fact, only Green Mansions is of the same imaginative order as the two main stories in this volume, 'El Ombú' and 'Marta Riquelme'. Ruth Tomalin says outright that 'El Ombú' 'is a masterpiece'; while John T. Frederick remarks of the story:

Few works of fiction of comparable length, in English or in any other literature, equal it in essential power or in completeness of achievement. 115

The power and the tragic intensity of the story are only equalled in Hudson's own work by 'Marta Riquelme' and by the last part of Green Mansions.

I will deal firstly with 'The Story of a Piebald Horse' and 'Niño Diablo', because they can be assumed to be chronologically prior to the other stories, and more importantly because they are much slighter pieces which I will therefore treat very summarily.<sup>116</sup> 'The Story of a Piebald Horse' and 'Niño Diablo' are brief sketches, picturesque, anecdotal, and concerned with exotic local detail, and here a comparison would be apt with R.B. Cunninghame Graham's sketches, except that Hudson's writing is somewhat more skilful than Cunninghame Graham's.<sup>117</sup>

My interest here in 'The Story of a Piebald Horse' is with its projection of the notion of fate or destiny - a notion central to El Ombú. The narrator of the story says:

I can laugh, too, knowing that all things are ordered by destiny; otherwise I might sit down and cry. 118

The chain of occurrences, and what happens to a person through that chain or sequence, is what I understand by the term 'fate' - the process by which one thing comes to pass rather than another. In 'The Story of a Piebald

Horse', we can see this chain as being partly forged through chance, and partly through a nexus of personal qualities and actions - including Torcuato's arrogance, and the perverse spirit of Chapaco, the man who helps bring about his death while they are marking cattle. The chain will dictate the strange way that Torcuato's foster-brother Anacleto, is freed to marry his foster-sister, Elaria. The piebald horse is a small thing in this narrative of fate, but a decisive one; it is while riding the piebald that Torcuato comes to his death, and it is through recognising the piebald that Anacleto discovers what has happened to Torcuato. The owner of the estancia where Torcuato met his death, a man named Sotelo, leaves the piebald outside a pulperia, hoping that someone will recognise it and let the deceased man's relatives know of his death. Elaria having been charged by her foster-father at his death-bed to marry Torcuato, she and Anacleto have waited to find out the missing Torcuato's fate before they can marry; the piebald, and the story which Sotelo has to tell in regard to it, brings their waiting to an end.

In 'Niño Diablo' it is the person of Niño that is of particular interest. Niño is marked out by the singularity of his personal being. He has a nearness to the realm of nature, with his sharp senses and his receptiveness and knowledge of the sounds and signs of wild life. His moral character is unconventional, but he is in no way amoral; he is a horse-thief, but steals only from the Indians (who killed his relations when Niño was a child, and are regarded by the other characters in the story as the 'infidel') or from those who offend him; and when asked by a stranger to rescue his captive wife from the Indians, Niño complies selflessly - without hesitation, and without regard for reward.

He appears mysteriously - materialises as if out of thin air - in the

household of Gregory Gorostiaga, and the mystery and the stealth are equally of the essence of the enigmatic Niño:

"Madre del Cielo, how you frightened me!" screamed one of the twins, giving a great start.

The cause of this sudden outcry was discovered in the presence of a young man quietly seated on the bench at the girl's side. He had not been there a minute before, and no person had seen him enter the room - what wonder that the girl was startled! He was slender in form and had small hands and feet, and oval, olive face, smooth as a girl's except for the incipient moustache on his lip. In the place of a hat he wore only a scarlet ribbon bound about his head, to keep back the glossy black hair that fell to his shoulders; and he was wrapped in a white woollen Indian poncho, while his lower limbs were cased in white colt-skin coverings, shaped like stockings to his feet, with the red tassels of his embroidered garters falling to the ankles. 119

The singularity of Niño is set in relief by the ordinariness of most of the characters - though Hudson manages to give their bustling small world a picturesque, lively aspect - and by the evil-minded, blustering character of Polycarp (whom Niño tricks by stealing his horses); the latter acts as a foil to Niño through his incarnation of a type - a stupid, arrogant buffoon - while Niño both eludes the typical, and stands as Polycarp's contrast in his quickness of mind, his quiet personal impressiveness, and the absence in him of Polycarp's vain boastfulness.

Gregory remarks of Niño:

"When he comes the dogs bark not - who knows why? His tread is softer than the cat's; the untamed horse is tamed for him. Always in the midst of dangers, yet no harm, no scratch. Why? Because he stoops like the falcon, makes his stroke and is gone - Heaven knows where!" 120

Perhaps more tellingly, he also says, earlier in the story:

"... the Niño... is freer than the wild things which Heaven has made...." 121

While it is certainly rudimentary, we can glimpse here the projection of an essentially enigmatic dimension to the person of Niño. The categories of psychological analysis can easily provide a causal relationship between Niño's captivity as a child with the Indians and their murder of his family, with his habit of stealing horses from them. Yet apart from this, he

remains elusive. Given the slightness of the story itself and the small space we are allowed for an unfolding of Niño's personhood, it would be wrong to make too much of this; but it is possible to say that in his elusiveness and in his closeness to nature Niño prefigures something of the personal dimensions to be found in the figure of Rima.

'El Ombú' is a story of fierce gravity; 'a succession of disasters', as Ruth Tomalin says,

yet so skilfully told that it has the pathos and dignity of Greek tragedy. 122

Told by Nicandro, an old man who has witnessed the 'succession of disasters', the tale is established from the first sentence as one of ruin and desolation; the estate called El Ombú - after the huge ombú tree 'standing solitary, where there is [now] no house' - is 'ownerless and ruined'.<sup>123</sup>

There is immediately projected a sense of inevitability -

... into every door sorrow must enter - sorrow and death that comes to all men; and every house must fall at last. 124

Edward Garnett said that in 'El Ombu' 'we feel that character and destiny are one'.<sup>125</sup> At points in the narrative, this is true; but we have to go beyond this formulation to understand the story more fully.

An equivalence or correlation between character and fate could be posited in relation to the way Hudson presents the fate of one of the characters at least: Don Santos Ugarte. The owner of El Ombu, Ugarte's character is deftly and concretely established:

In all houses, for many leagues around, the children were taught to reverence him, calling him 'uncle', and when he appeared they would run and, dropping on their knees before him, cry out 'Benediccion mi tio'. He would give them his blessing; then, after tweaking a nose and pinching an ear or two, he would flourish his whip over their heads to signify that he had done with them, and that they must quickly get out of his way. 126

The imperiousness and self-importance of the man are further illustrated as

the story proceeds; and they are turned towards very considerable cruelty in the treatment of his third wife, who is reduced to a desperately unhappy and frightened creature by Ugarte because of her childlessness. Nicandro indeed speaks of 'his indomitable temper and his violence'.<sup>127</sup> But he also characterises him as 'so strong, so brave, so noble'; and recounts his generosity to both the poor and to the religious orders.<sup>128</sup> The tragic quality of Ugarte's story resides in this division of his nature: he is a man who is capable of much good; but he is also a man flawed by arrogance and cruelty, and in this resides the cause of his downfall. This comes about through his anger over a young slave, Meliton, whom Ugarte favours over all his other slaves. Meliton buys his freedom, in accordance with law, while wishing to remain in Ugarte's service - without payment, but not as a slave. Ugarte's inflated self-regard causes him to see this as 'ingratitude', and he throws the money into Meliton's face, with such force that he is cut and bruised, before ordering him off his estate. Two years later Meliton returns, hoping for forgiveness. Ugarte shoots him, and then has to flee first to Buenos Ayres, and from there to Montevideo, where he remains while he tries to arrange for a pardon. The pardon, however, never comes. The Advocate and the Judge assigned to his case quarrel about how his bribe is to be shared out, and he becomes forgotten, eventually slipping into insanity and dying without ever again seeing El Ombú - which in the meantime has fallen into ruins, and then become the home of the unfortunate Valerio de la Cueva.

Valerio's fate is also worth recounting in some detail, because whereas we can see Ugarte's downfall in correlation with his flawed character, Valerio's story eludes this correlation - at any rate, in such a straightforward and unambiguous way. Valerio is a poor man who comes to reside at El Ombú because no one else will live there - the reason being that it is

inhabited by ghosts. Nicandro describes Valerio in a more 'high-flown' manner than is customary, as if endeavouring to do full justice to his friend:

Perhaps on rising and going out, on some clear morning in summer, he looked at the sun when it rose, and perceived an angel sitting in it, and as he gazed, something from that being fell upon and passed into and remained with him. Such a man was Valerio. 129

He also characterises him as:

He who was so brave, so generous, even in his poverty, of so noble a spirit, yet so gentle; whose words were sweeter than honey to me! 130

Nicandro and Valerio are inducted into the army, under a brutal commander named Colonel Barboza; after an arduous, gruelling campaign, the men are paid off so miserably that they ask Valerio to act as their spokesman in complaining to Barboza; the Colonel responds by having Valerio given two hundred lashes after which he is thrown into the road. Nicandro discovers him, being cared for by a compassionate storekeeper; and they set off back to El Ombú. Valerio dies just in front of the house, before his wife and child can reach him. Unlike Ugarte, Valerio is not undone by a flaw of character. One might want to claim that his virtue - in his willingness to bear the complaints of the soldiers to Barboza, despite the latter's brutal, ruthless nature - is itself the means of his downfall, and that we have again some sort of correlation between character and fate. Hudson's narrative, however, incorporates a different view. Nicandro says, speaking of Valerio's destiny:

... when misfortune has singled out a man for its prey, it will follow him to the end, and he shall not escape from it though he mount up to the clouds like the falcon, or thrust himself deep down into the earth like the armadillo. 131

This might be taken as merely the view of Hudson's character Nicandro, and not that of Hudson himself. But the last tragic event of 'El Ombú' - Monica's lapse into insanity - is so clearly an example of the sheer force of tragic occurrence crushing some vital part of an innocent human life (in



this case, the reason), that the chain or build-up of occurrence - the fate or destiny - is thrown into relief, demanding consideration independently of any simple correlation with character. It is impossible in terms of what we know to say why these things should so happen that as a consequence Monica should lose her reason, and having conceded this, I think that it can be said that the same is true of Valerio. (This is not to say that there may not be some further - complex, subtle - correlation that can be drawn between character and fate; but it would be one that goes beyond the straightforward facts or events of the story - and, I should say, beyond the facts that we generally have at our disposal in everyday life.) That this is not the same thing as an actively employed power called 'misfortune' - as Nicandro means to posit - I would grant; I believe it is necessary to read between the lines, as it were, of Nicandro's narration in order to attend to what the narrative is disclosing. The gratuitously tragic build-up of events disclosed in 'El Ombu' can be seen as the very inversion of that purposiveness which Hudson, elsewhere, wanted to see at work in the universe; and in 'Marta Riquelme' the 'negativity' of this build-up attains that obdurate and terrible 'darkness' I invoked earlier when comparing Hudson with Melville.<sup>132</sup>

There is also a different way of suggesting a space between character and destiny, which can be seen in the manner that Valerio's personal qualities transcend the vicissitudes of his fate. His wife, Donata, says of him:

"No misfortune and no injustice could change that heart, or turn his sweetness sour." 133

His complete lack of bitterness at the treatment he has received at Barboza's hands - despite the great pain he is in - carries conviction that Donata's view of him is thoroughly accurate.<sup>134</sup> The good of certain characters, like Valerio, acts as a contrast to the 'negativity' or 'darkness' in Hudson's writings; in this, it assumes the same function as the

epiphanic beauty of nature, or the sublimity of Rima in Green Mansions.

Before turning to 'Marta Riquelme' I want to say a little about the specifically artistic qualities of 'El Ombú'. Hudson's 'ordered telling of life as it must have happened', as Pound called it, has in its measured, even lines a finely-wrought simplicity, which can rise to imagistic lyricism, as in the following passage about the ombú tree.<sup>135</sup>

... there are other things [besides memories] that come back to us from the past; I mean ghosts. Sometimes, at midnight, the whole tree, from its great roots to its topmost leaves, is seen from a distance shining like white fire. What is that fire, seen of so many, which does not scorch the leaves? 136

The image is given, not for decorativeness, but to disclose and bear in upon the mind the sense of tragedy that lies at the heart of 'El Ombú': only the ghostly white fire - and the sounds of ghostly people and animals - are left to inhabit this estate. They are its life - now that the lives of those who lived there, and their habitation, have been brought to ruin. Similarly, Hudson's prose narrates events of terrible violence and madness in the same even, quiet register. This simple presentation which, as it were, lets events speak out for themselves, gathers to itself a considerable power. That this power can be more affective, more haunting and moving, than the use of a more rhetorical mode, may be seen in the account of Barboza's death. Barboza - now a General - is attacked by an assassin, who turns out to be Valerio's son, Bruno; Barboza kills him, and drinks the blood from his death-wound. Afterwards he falls prey to a strange malady, which someone advises him is due to

"a failure of a natural heat of the blood, and only by means of animal heat, not by drugs, could health be recovered." 137

The body of a live bull is cut open, and General Barboza consents to being placed naked inside the body. This is Hudson's description of the result of this 'treatment':

"Then very suddenly, almost before the bellowings had ceased, shrieks were heard from the enclosure, and in a moment, while we [i.e. the

General's men] all stood staring and wondering, out rushed the General, stark naked, reddened with that bath of warm blood he had been in, a sword which he had hastily snatched up in his hand. Leaping over the barrier, he stood still for an instant, then catching sight of the great mass of men before him he flew at them, yelling and whirling his sword so that it looked like a shining wheel in the sun. The men seeing that he was raving mad fled before him, and for a space of a hundred yards or more he pursued them; then the superhuman energy was ended; the sword flew from his hand, he staggered, and fell prostrate on the earth. 138

The remarkable restraint of this passage, in which the murderous Barboza enters the bull like entering his own element - the element of blood - only to reap the rewards of insanity and death, makes possible the quick transition from this moment of horror to a climax of moving tragedy. Monica, in finding out that Barboza's assailant was Bruno, falls to the ground senseless, and is insane from that time on. This, of course, repeats - but in a reversal - Barboza's end; whereas he went insane and fell to the ground never to rise again, Monica falls to the ground and is then insane. The lyrical image with which 'El Ombú' ends brings home the tragedy of Monica, but also quietly insists upon the difference between her end and those of Ugarte, Valerio, Bruno and the other unhappy characters of the story. Monica spends her time watching flamingoes; and in her simple joy in watching them, there is a picture of pathetic redemption from the overwhelmingly tragic nexus of events and lives:

... every time she catches sight of a flock moving like a red line across the lake she cries out with delight. That is her one happiness - her life. And she is the last of all those who have lived in my time at El Ombú. 139

'Marta Riquelme' takes place in a desolate, isolated region which is not merely a geographical region, but a region of the spirit. The ruin of the estate in 'El Ombú' mirrors and symbolises the human ruin of the story; but it is also causally related to the ruin of the first of the story's principal characters, Ugarte. Although the priest's state of mind in 'Marta

Riquelme' is, conversely, causally related, at least in part, to the geographical desolation and remoteness, at another level it is related to the human and spiritual qualities he finds in the place; however, what relation there is between spiritual fate and the qualities of the region (at whatever level), cannot be posited in terms of a strict causal relation either in 'Marta Riquelme' nor any of Hudson's other work. Marta's fate reflects or rather brings to a singularly intense focus the spiritual 'darkness' of the region; which in turn corresponds to the geographic aspects.

The Jesuit priest who narrates 'Marta Riquelme' describes the Andean province of Jujuy as

the remotest of our provinces, and divided from the countries of the Pacific by the giant range of the Cordillera; a region of mountains and forest, torrid heats and great storms; and although in itself a country half as large as the Spanish peninsula, it possesses as its only means of communication with the outside world, a few insignificant roads; which are scarcely more than mule-paths. 140

The settlement of Yala, to which the priest is attached, appears to him as 'a rude, desolate chaos of rocks and gigantic mountains'.<sup>141</sup> He further characterises Jujuy as a place in which the Christian gospel has been accepted only at a superficial level; where his efforts as a priest have no effect on his parishioners; where the Devil wages 'an equal war amongst Christ's followers'.<sup>142</sup> He also discovers negative aspects to his own character - which are drawn forth by the place and the people. He gives way to passion, which, as a priest, he feels as a temptation and a torment. When the priest first meets Marta, she is a girl of fifteen, pure Spanish as distinct from the Indians of Jujuy. The 'Christian affection' that he originally feels for her 'insensibly [degenerates] into a mundane passion' of great intensity.<sup>143</sup> Because of this he feels it necessary to stop visiting the house of Marta and her mother - the one house in Yala where he had found pleasurable company.

He also gives way to angry and violent emotions at being unable to dissuade a peasant from what the priest considers 'superstition'. The 'superstition' is that of the Kakué, so that the priest's discovery of one failing - his inability to hold back a violent temper - is strangely linked to his other failing (his passion for Marta), for Marta is destined to become a Kakué,

a fowl frequenting the most gloomy and sequestered forests and known to everyone in the country for its terrible voice. 144

- a voice which the priest describes in the following way:

In sound it was a human cry, yet expressing a degree of agony and despair surpassing the power of any human soul to feel.... 145

The natives believe that the Kakué

is a metamorphosed human being, that women and sometimes men, whose lives have been darkened with great suffering and calamities, are changed by compassionate spirits into the lugubrious birds.... 146

The metamorphosis is linked to the idea of a surpassing of what a human being could feel, as if in going beyond some limit, one became something-else-than-human. Unlike Rosaura in 'Pelino Viera's Confession', who becomes a bird-woman through applying a magical ointment to her body, the Kakué-figure is neither demonic nor morally evil as such; rather, it symbolises all that is 'darkest' or most terrible in the human soul in the way of despair and agony - sufficiently, excessively 'dark' as to be unrecognizable as 'human'.<sup>147</sup>

The narration of 'Marta Riquelme' is in part a narration of fault - that is, where it is not a witnessing of misfortune. The priest states that 'the secret enemy of my soul had revealed itself to me' in those 'sudden violent outbursts of passion' to which he is prone.<sup>148</sup> His passion for Marta, which of course he also feels to be a sin, leads to another fault, in relation to Marta's marriage, when, because of his own feelings for the girl, he refuses to assist Marta's mother in dissuading her from the marriage.

The misfortunes that overtake the blameless Marta need only be briefly outlined here; she makes an unwise marriage with a man named Cosme Luna, a gambler and idler, a person - according to the priest - 'possessing a hundred vices under a pleasing exterior and not one redeeming virtue'; Luna is inducted into the army while away on one of his periodic absences, and Marta, with their small child, goes to search for him; she is captured by a band of Indians, forced into marriage, and very brutally treated - remaining in captivity for five years, during which time she bears the Indian three children; she escapes with another captive and the latter's Indian husband, taking only her youngest child with her - and the Indian, presumably considering it a burden, drops the child down a ravine.<sup>149</sup> To the years of brutality and enforced marriage, has to be added, then, the separation from her children and the murder of the youngest of them. It can scarcely be wondered that when Marta makes her way back to Yala, the priest finds her greatly changed:

Was this woman indeed Marta, once the pride of Yala! It was hard to believe it, so darkened with the burning suns and winds of years was her face, once so fair; so wasted and furrowed with grief and the many hardships she had undergone! Her figure, worn almost to a skeleton, was clothed with ragged garments, while her head, bowed down with sorrow and despair, was divested of that golden crown which had been her chief ornament. 150

However, her misfortune has not come to an end with her return; she recovers somewhat, but does so while putting her hopes for the future on the return of her husband, Cosme, and that is the cause of her ruin; for when Cosme does return, he refuses to recognise Marta as the woman he married, claiming to know that Marta is dead. This is an excuse for abandoning her; and Marta's desolation is mixed with shame at her treatment. From this point, Marta seeks solitude - the solitude of the woods near Yala - in which she gives vent to her anguish, and to accusations against God:

... casting herself on the earth, [she would] break forth into the most heart-rending cries and lamentations, loudly exclaiming that God had

unjustly punished her, that He was a being filled with malevolence, and speaking many things against Him very dreadful to hear. 151

The scene of Marta's metamorphosis is one of the most powerful passages in Hudson's writing. 'Marta Riquelme' shares with 'El Ombú' that restraint or reserve with which events of tragic and sometimes violent character are narrated, with intense, grave and moving effect. The scene takes place on a day when 'even the elements were charged with unusual gloom':

... the trees, in that still, thick atmosphere, were like figures of trees hewn out of solid inky-black rock and set up in some shadowy subterranean region to mock its inhabitants with an imitation of the upper world. 152

This extraordinary description sets the key for Marta's metamorphosis by placing it, figuratively, in a 'shadowy subterranean region'. The description of what the priest sees when he finds Marta is worth quoting at some length. Marta is discovered sitting

on the trunk of a fallen tree, which was sodden with the rain and half buried under great creepers and masses of dead and rotting foliage. She was in a crouching attitude, her feet gathered under her garments, which were now torn to rags and fouled with clay; her elbows were planted on her drawn-up knees, and her long, bony fingers thrust into her hair, which fell in tangled disorder over her face. To this pitiable condition had she been brought by great and unmerited sufferings.

Seeing her, a cry of compassion escaped my lips, and casting myself off my mule I advanced towards her. As I approached she raised her eyes to mine, and then I stood still, transfixed with amazement and horror at what I saw; for they were no longer those soft violet orbs which had retained until recently their sweet pathetic expression; now they were round and wild-looking, open to thrice their ordinary size, and filled with a lurid yellow fire, giving them a resemblance to the eyes of some hunted savage animal. 153

He sees that she has lost her reason; and holds up his crucifix before her:

This movement seemed to infuriate her; the insane, desolate eyes, from which all human expression had vanished, became like two burning balls, which seemed to shoot out sparks of fire; her short hair rose up until it stood like an immense crest on her head; and suddenly bringing down her skeleton-like hands she thrust the crucifix violently from her, uttering at the same time a succession of moans and cries that pierced my heart with pain to hear. And presently flinging up her arms, she burst forth into shrieks so terrible in the depth of agony they expressed that overcome by the sound I sank upon the earth and hid my face. 154

At this moment, she changes - in the belief of the priest, and those who are with him - into a Kakué. For when the priest looks again, Marta is not there:

In another form - that strange form of the Kakué - she had fled out of our sight for ever to hide in those gloomy woods which were henceforth to be her dwelling place. 155

As indicated earlier in this chapter, Marta's transformation involves both an orientation of the soul - the immaterial part of the person - and a picture of metamorphosis as tragic occurrence. We have in Marta's fate a symbol of the power of 'darkness', where the person is plunged beyond the limits of what we recognise as 'human' - plunged into a domain of insanity and abysmal anguish, a domain that is linked to the supernatural in the terms of the narrative, at least. This is, with Green Mansions, the furthest point of W.H. Hudson's exploration of 'darkness', for here he inverts the traditional symbolism of metamorphosis - a symbolism of continuity beyond separate life-forms and beyond the apparent discontinuity of life and death - to give this 'positive' power of life a 'negative' form. In 'Marta Riquelme' it is 'darkness' that has the power of effecting continuity, where by virtue of the utter extremity of her desolation Marta exceeds the limits of the 'human' but continues life in another form. Marta's transformation is also one of the most harrowing examples in Hudson's writing of what, in Part One, I have referred to as 'negative' epiphany, wherein we are given a glimpse into a terrible emptiness, or a situation or moment of dread or horror - involving an illumination of (one mode or aspect of) the ground of our being.



Chapter Six

As Morley Roberts tells us, Green Mansions was many years in the writing.<sup>156</sup> It is Hudson's best-known work; and in my opinion only El Ombú matches its imaginative power amongst his entire oeuvre. The book has certain faults, such as an awkwardness in some of the dialogue and occasional other lapses in Hudson's use of language. (I will call attention to these in the course of my discussion of the novel.) There are also occasional faults in the construction; most glaringly, in the motivation for Rima's return to the forest alone, which results in her destruction at the hands of the Indians: her wish to make a new dress for herself before Abel's return, because her love for him now makes her feel ashamed to appear in her old clothing, is transparently a mechanical plot-device necessitated by the need for some separation between Abel and Rima at that point in the story. But all these faults are in the nature of minor lapses. Ruth Tomalin is surely correct when she writes:

Whether read as romance or poignant metaphor, Green Mansions is like no other tale; it pierces the heart; and it is unforgettable. 157

What I wish to emphasise here are the perspectives upon being which the novel opens up; for in these reside much, at least, of the power and the beauty which make the book so 'unforgettable'. I will be looking at certain symbolic/mythopoeic elements in the novel as a way of delineating these perspectives: namely, the use of landscape; snake and bird symbolism; the figure of Rima and the question of identity; and the theme of 'darkness'.

i. Landscape

In Part One I remarked upon the way that landscape embodies different forms, structures or modes of being - corresponding to various modalities of consciousness.<sup>158</sup> I have briefly indicated this concern elsewhere in this Part of the thesis.<sup>159</sup> The natural or geographical context particularly forms an imaginal richness, however, in Green Mansions; corresponding to the complexity or richness of the novel as a whole. The stories 'El Ombú' and 'Marta Riquelme' have a stark intensity, but they are explorations within, so to speak, a restricted or localised palette. The palette of Green Mansions is much more varied. To put it another way, Hudson manages in this book to bring together his major concerns, with the paradisaical and with 'darkness', and in such a way that his imaginal world is present in both its diversity and its integrity.

Abel describes Guayana as a whole as

that vast and almost unexplored territory we [Venezualans] possess south of the Orinoco, with its countless unmapped rivers and trackless forests; and... its savage inhabitants, with their ancient customs and character, unadulterated by contact with Europeans. 160

This removed, unchartered landscape that has not been assimilated to the known, the familiar, serves as ambience and support for a witnessing of marvels, primarily in relation to Rima. Abel's narrative is a telling of strange and wondrous things about human existence; as well as being a confession of 'dark' and dreadful things about human existence. The main part of the narrative takes place in a district of Guayana called Parahuari, 'a mountainous country west of the Orinoco'.<sup>161</sup> It is here that he takes up residence in the village of an Indian tribe; the village lies

in the midst of a high broken country of forest and savannah and many swift streams.... 162

It is a place of sufficient beauty for Abel to experience a kind of

revelation, which induces him to stay on in Parahuari:

Doubtless into the turbid tarn of my heart some sacred drops had fallen - from the passing birds, from that crimson disc which had now dropped below the horizon, the darkening hills, the rose and blue of infinite heaven, from the whole visible circle; and I felt purified and had a strange sense and apprehension of a secret innocence and spirituality in nature - a prescience of some bourn, incalculably distant perhaps, to which we are all moving; of a time when the heavenly rain shall have washed us clean from all spot and blemish. 163

But part of the landscape is 'barren, stony ground'; and moving from the specifically 'natural' to the human/cultural, Parahuari is also a place of residence for the Indians whom he more and more sees in terms of baseness.<sup>164</sup>

The most important landscape of the narrative, however, which forms a direct thematic contrast to the Indian village, is the nearby forest, those 'green mansions' of five or six square miles located near the mountain Ytaioa.

The phrase 'green mansions' finds explanation in the following passage, which provides a characterization of the forest-landscape (it is also a good example of Hudson's descriptive writing in this book):

Even where the trees were largest the sunshine penetrated, subdued by the foliage to exquisite greenish golden tints, filling the wide lower spaces with tender half-lights, and faint blue-and-grey shadows. (...) ... what a roof was that above my head! ... Here Nature is unapproachable with her green, airy canopy, a sun-impregnated cloud - cloud above cloud; and though the highest may be unreached by the eye, the beams yet filter through, illumining the wide spaces beneath - chamber succeeded by chamber, each with its own special lights and shadows. 165

It is worth noting here the way Hudson assimilates vegetation - and the forest as a specific place - to an imagery of light and sky (cloud), with their symbolic evocation of the spirit. The appropriation of vegetation to light also appears strongly in the following passage:

The sun was sinking behind the forest, its broad disc still showing through the topmost leaves, and the higher part of the foliage was of a luminous green, like green flame, throwing off flakes of quivering, fiery light.... 166

If he found some revelation of nature's spirituality elsewhere in the district, the 'green mansions' inspire a happiness which makes Abel thank 'the Author of [his] being for the gift of that wild forest' - and this is

at a point in the narrative prior to his seeing Rima.<sup>167</sup> The Indians, however, fear the forest and refuse to enter it; Rima's presence in the forest - interpreted by them as a malign force - knots together, concentrates, that spirituality evoked by the light-and-sky imagery.<sup>168</sup> The forest also involves an opposite or contradistinctive ambience, where its enclosed darkness at night and its mysterious spaces give support to the terrors that Abel experiences in the latter part of the book.<sup>169</sup> Traditionally there is a sense of the forest as a place where the supernatural in both its 'positive' and its 'negative' aspects may be concentrated; we find this in folklore and also in literary works (e.g. Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter). This sense is maintained in the narrative of Green Mansions. The forest is, easily, the most important geographical locus in the novel; but I wish to give two examples of other uses of scene. One is the mountain. It is on the mountain of Ytaioa - with the wide vistas it provides a view upon below - that Rima expresses her wish to find her own race, who will be able to understand her strange language. The mountain, as a vantage-point, gives a sense of access to distant places or realms; while its elevation has the symbolic resonance appropriate to the theme of Rima's lineage, because this can only be imaged in terms of some 'higher' people. Riolama, the place of Rima's origin, is itself a range of mountains; but when Abel reaches the place there where Rima's mother was discovered by Nuflo, he describes it as 'a big, barren hill'.<sup>170</sup> This is, in the economy of the narrative's symbolism, appropriate enough; for when Nuflo found Rima's mother at this spot, her people had already - it is to be assumed - perished in some calamity; and Rima's search ends, not at any more fecund height, but at a barren spot of disappointment. The other example will have to be given in very general and vague terms. Towards the end of the narrative, Abel describes the places he journeyed through on his way back to 'civilization';

they constitute a landscape of nightmare, or rather a series of such landscapes:

I only know that marshes that were like Sloughs of Despond, and barren and wet savannahs, were crossed; and forests that seemed infinite in extent and never to be got through; and scores of rivers that boiled round the sharp rocks, threatening to submerge or dash in pieces the frail bark canoe - black and frightful to look on as rivers in hell; and nameless mountain after mountain to be toiled over. 171

This symbolic geography - with its evocation of Bunyan's Slough of Despond, and of 'rivers in hell' - exists as an itinerary of places that contextualise and reflect the state of Abel's soul; and its dominant qualities are capable of assimilating elements like forest and mountain through the latter's negative or ambiguous aspects. Threat, tedium, horror, and toil are the key-notes of this apparently infernal, but more truly purgatorial, geography. Abel struggles through these landscapes in order to reach some place of safety; not just physical safety, but safety of mind and soul.

## ii. Snake-symbolism

I will turn next to snake-symbolism. In no other novel of Hudson's does the figure of the snake occupy such an important place. But in order to explicate some of its meaning, I wish to draw on the 'snake-chapters' of The Book of a Naturalist, and on the writings of two authors employed by Hudson in those chapters.

Hudson quotes at some length from Ruskin's The Queen of the Air, prefacing the quotation with the remark that:

It would be hard, I imagine, to find a passage of greater beauty on this subject than Ruskin's own.... 172

In this passage, Ruskin stresses the universality of the mythic importance of the serpent; and this is also stressed by Hudson in these pages.<sup>173</sup>

Ruskin goes on to write:

Is there indeed no tongue, except the mute forked flash from its lips, in that running brook of horror on the ground? Why that horror? We all feel it, yet how disproportionate to the real strength of the creature! ... But that horror is of the myth, not of the creature... it is the strength of the base element that is so dreadful in the serpent; it is the omnipotence of the earth.(...) It is a divine hieroglyph of the demoniac power of the earth, of the entire earthly nature. 174

Hudson also quotes this extraordinary descriptive passage from the same source, which emphasises both the mysterious motions of the snake and its deadliness:

That rivulet of smooth silver - how does it flow, think you? It literally rows on the earth, with every scale for an oar; it bites the dust with the ridges of its body. Watch it when it moves slowly; a wave, but without a wind! a current, but with no fall! all the body moving at the same instant, yet some of it to one side, some to another, and some forward, and the rest of the coil backwards; but all with the same calm will and equal way - no contraction, no extension; one soundless, causeless march of sequent rings, a spectral procession of spotted dust, with dissolution in its fangs, dislocation in its coils. Startle it: the winding stream will become a twisted arrow; the wave of poisoned life will lash through the grass like a cast lance. 175

Hudson's interest in these passages (besides the beauty of the prose) is in the emphases involved, and in what one might call the sagacity of Ruskin's description (that is, the depth of understanding which is involved); and if it is unlikely that he would have agreed - in a straightforward way at least - with Ruskin that the snake 'is a divine hieroglyph of the demoniac power of the earth', if we replace the term demoniac with chthonic, I think we would have a good idea of the type of symbolic figure the snake becomes in Green Mansions.<sup>176</sup> It should be added, however, that although Ruskin holds that the primary meaning of the snake, as 'the clothed power of the dust', is 'the grasp and sting of death', to be contrasted with the bird as 'the symbol of the spirit of life'; and that serpent-worship is a sign of mankind's degradation and corruption; he is at the same time capable of asserting a 'positive' symbolism of the snake:

... there is [also] a power in the earth to take away corruption, and to purify, (hence the very fact of burial, and many uses of earth,

only lately known); and in this sense, the serpent is a healing spirit.... 177

Hudson's fascination with the snake involves an apprehension of it as an ambivalent power, too; his difference from Ruskin revolves around the latter's central concentration upon the snake's 'negative' aspects.<sup>178</sup> It is this ambivalence that Hudson points up through another quotation, from his correspondence with Rev. Samuel Lockwood (writing on the pine snake):

In our thinking a serpent ranks as a paradox among animals. There is so much seeming contradiction. At one time encircling its prey as in iron bands; again assuming the immovable posturings of a statue; then melting into movements so intricate and delicate that the lithe limbless thing looks like gossamer incarnate. In this creature all the unities seem to be set aside. Such weakness and such strength; such gentleness and such vindictiveness; so much of beauty and yet so repulsive; fascination and terror; what need to wonder that, whether snake or python, the serpent should so figure in the myths of all ages and the literature of the whole world! 179

Lockwood also stresses the snake's sublimity:

... the pine snake is capable of performing some evolutions of movement which are not only beautiful, but so intricate and delicate as to make them seem imbued with the nature we call spiritual. 180

Lockwood adds that the pine snake's motions reminded him of Ezekial's 'vision of mystic wheels'.<sup>181</sup> The paradoxical and ambivalent symbolism of the snake includes the sense of wonder, mystery and sublimity it induces; as well the 'negative' aspects, fastening upon its dangerousness, indeed, malevolence.

To turn now to the way the snake, or snakes, appear in Green Mansions; it is in connection with a snake that Abel is afforded both his first palpable encounter with Rima, and his first knowledge of the more fiery aspects of her character (in this case, the manifestation of wrath). He is about to kill a coral snake, which at first sight is only 'a gleam of brilliant colour' on the ground, but which on closer inspection Abel recognises as a creature

famed as much for its beauty and singularity as for its deadly character. It was about three feet long, and very slim; its ground colour a brilliant vermillion, with broad jet-black rings at equal

distances round its body, each black ring or band divided by a narrow yellow strip in the middle. The symmetrical pattern and vividly contrasted colours would have given it the appearance of an artificial snake made by some fanciful artist, but for the gleam of life in its bright coils. Its fixed eyes, too, were living gems, and from the point of its dangerous arrowy head the glistening tongue flickered ceaselessly.... 182

Abel makes no secret of his admiration of the snake; but its dangerousness outweighs that admiration. Nor is the dangerousness of the snake discounted in the narrative; for the snake does, after Rima's intervention, bite him. What is most striking in this whole sequence - even more striking than the intensity with which Hudson narrates Abel's mad dash through the forest, through sudden twilight, rain, and lightning, after he has been bitten - is the way that Rima is associated with the snake. There is more to this than simply Rima's fellow-feeling for all the animals of the forest. Without the snake becoming a corresponding figure for Rima (in the way that the bird is made an analogue for her), there is much of the paradoxical and mysterious about Rima, with an emphasis upon the uniting of contradictory traits of (personal) being, that is reminiscent of what has been said above about the snake - although without those negative aspects that give the snake its ambivalent quality. (It is only to the Indians - her opposites - that Rima appears as a negative being.) In his first clear encounter with Rima, for example, her elusive and shy appearance has changed, dramatically, to a bold and fiery demeanour.

... finding another stone, I raised and was about to launch it when a sharp, ringing cry issued from the bushes growing near, and, quickly following the sound, forth stepped the forest girl; no longer elusive and shy, vaguely seen in the shadowy wood, but boldly challenging attention, exposed to the full power of the meridian sun, which made her appear luminous and rich in colour beyond example.... The torrent of ringing and to me inarticulate sounds in that unknown tongue, her rapid gestures, and above all her wide-open sparkling eyes and face aflame with colour, made it impossible to mistake the nature of her feeling. 183

The snake, whose defender Rima has elected to be, is as harmless to her as it is harmful to Abel; it is depicted - shortly before it actually does



strike Abel - as 'lying there motionless' with its head resting on Rima's foot, 'the deadly thing [having] the appearance of a gaily coloured silken garter just dropped from her leg'.<sup>184</sup> The snake appears like an ornament or article of Rima's dress in this image; clearly it is associated with her through identification with nature, and through a shared symbolism of paradox, changefulness or permeability, creating a sense of wonder or mystery.

The use of snake-imagery later in the narrative is far more sinister, in accordance with the predominantly 'dark' character of the novel's latter part. Abel comes across a snake with

a broad, flat, murderous head, with stony, ice-like, whity-blue eyes, cold enough to freeze a victim's blood in its veins.... 185

He kills the snake, to eat; cutting off the head and throwing it away. He becomes haunted, however, by the notion that

the white, lidless, living eyes were following me still, and would always be following me.... 186

Aside from revealing just how tormented Abel's soul is, the image of the snake here draws on two aspects of snake-symbolism - its malevolence and that indestructibly perduring quality which its identification with the life-force gives it. The extra-ordinary significance of the snake is suggested by the literal growth of its appearance in Abel's consciousness:

... the severed head would grow and grow in the night-time to something monstrous at last, the hellish white lidless eyes increasing to the size of two full moons. 187

Hudson also draws upon the 'negative' mythic associations of the serpent in having Abel suggest that he and the snake are kindred in both being 'eaters of the dust, singled out and cursed above all cattle'; that is, as the serpent was the instrument of evil in Eden, so Abel (whom, in his imagination, the snake repeatedly condemns as a murderer) has become ensnared in moral and spiritual 'darkness', alienating himself from the paradisial.<sup>188</sup>

Abel is haunted by a number of 'serpent fancies' during his journey towards the end of the narrative.<sup>189</sup> The mountain of Roraima becomes appropriated by snake-imagery. A seemingly impassible 'gigantic wall of stone', it looks in the moonlight to have

a league-long spectral serpent which was now dropping its coils from the mighty stone table to frighten away the rash intruder

- a 'huge sinuous rope of white mist' becoming a serpent, the mountain's guardian spirit.<sup>190</sup> The way that the mountain's seeming impassibility becomes entangled with the snake-figure's 'negativity', is obvious enough and without need of further comment. The worst of Abel's 'serpent fancies' (in his own estimation) is perhaps more interesting; this involves motlings on the earth which appear to be the markings of a gigantic snake.

... the tremendous ophidian head would become increasingly real to my sight, with glistening scales and symmetrical markings... and when I cast my eyes behind me I could see no end to its great coils extending across the savannah. Even looking back from the summit of a high hill I could see it stretching leagues and leagues away through forests and rivers, across wide plains, valleys and mountains, to lose itself at last in the infinite blue distance. 191

Abel's vision of the serpent here recalls Ruskin's remark that the serpent is a hieroglyph 'of the entire earthly nature':

As the bird is the clothed power of the air, so this is the clothed power of the dust.... 192

The image employed by Hudson at one stroke extends indefinitely the dominion of the serpent (as a symbolic 'power') and underlines a particular aspect of its richly ambivalent - but in this part of the book, principally 'negative' - symbolism. Ruskin's symbolic opposition of bird to serpent, air to earth, life to death, is never explicitly favoured by Hudson; and in general terms, he may well have resisted it, given his more sympathetic feelings toward the snake. But in the latter part of Green Mansions, Abel and the snake are equally singled out as 'eaters of the dust', and equally 'cursed among cattle'; and the snake's association with the earth, in this passage, and

its identification with it in the other passage cited above, are set in a profoundly 'negative' context - a context of 'darkness'. As such, Abel's snake visions constitute further examples of that 'negative' epiphany which I have remarked above in relation to 'Marta Riquelme'.

### iii. Bird-symbolism

If the ambivalent symbolism of the snake tends, apart from the snake's association with Rima, to be employed in relation to the thematics of 'darkness', the bird consistently has a much more 'positive' symbolic rôle. In Part One (Chapters Four and Six) I have shown the particular significance which the bird has in Hudson's writings, with its strong relationship to a symbolism of the soul and the spirit. In Green Mansions the spiritual significance of the bird for Hudson is brought home in the following passage, which unfortunately is also notable for its lapse into an 'inflated' mode of writing that hardly reveals Hudson's verbal skills at their best. Abel hears the sound of the campanero or bell-bird:

A bell, yet not made of gross metal dug out of the earth, but of an ethereal, sublimer material that floats impalpable and invisible in space - a vital bell suspended on nothing, giving out sounds in harmony with the vastness of blue heaven, the unsullied purity of nature, the glory of the sun, and conveying a mystic, a higher message to the soul than the sounds that surge from tower and belfry.

O mystic bell-bird of the heavenly race of the swallow and dove, the quetzal and the nightingale! When the brutish savage and the brutish white man that slay thee, one for food, the other for the benefit of science, shall have passed away, live still, live to tell thy message to the blameless spiritualised race that shall come after us to possess the earth, not for a thousand years, but for ever; for how much shall thy voice be to our clarified successors when even to my dull, unpurged soul, thou canst speak such high things, and bring it a sense of an impersonal, all-comprising One who is in me and I in him, flesh of his flesh and soul of his soul. 193

The bird with its 'ethereal' and 'sublime' sound, which is capable of bringing to Abel a sense of the divine - 'of an impersonal, all-comprising

One', stands in stark contrast to 'the brutish savage and the brutish white man' that slay it; and that contrast is repeated in the contrast between Rima, who similarly awakens in Abel a sense of the divine, and those 'savages' who slay her.

Rima, who represents in Green Mansions the 'sublime' aspects of personal being, is from beginning to end associated with the figure of the bird ('impetuous, bird-like Rima', Abel calls her at one point), which is, as we have seen, a vehicle for sublimity.<sup>194</sup> The first time Rima appears in the narrative, it is as a mysterious vocal manifestation - whether of 'bird or [human] being', Abel is unable to decide.<sup>195</sup>

... the silence of the forest seemed very profound; but before I had been resting many moments it was broken by a low strain of exquisite bird-melody, wonderfully pure and expressive, unlike any musical sound I had ever heard before.... But its greatest charm was its resemblance to the human voice - a voice purified and brightened to something almost angelic. 196

As the bell-bird is given the epithet 'mystic' for its voice, so Rima's voice is described as 'purified and brightened to something almost angelic'. The bird and Rima are united through a shared symbolism - of the spiritual - rooted in specific characteristics (most particularly, vocalisation). Another way of saying this, is that Hudson uses the symbolically-resonant figure of the bird to help establish Rima's symbolic qualities.

Hudson keeps to the bird-image in the description of Rima's death - a passage which is incidentally, expressive of 'negative' epiphany in its image of the terrifying destruction of the earthly embodiment of the paradisiacal. The Indian Kua-kó tells Abel of how they trapped Rima in a tree, and burned the tree down:

"... the flames went up higher and higher with a great noise; and at last from the top of the tree, out of the green leaves, came a great cry, like the cry of a bird, 'Abel! Abel!' and then looking we saw something fall; through leaves and smoke and flame it fell like a great white bird killed with an arrow and falling to the earth, and fell into the flames beneath. And it was the daughter of the Didi, and she was burnt to ashes...." 197

This passage is the most obvious source for Roberts' remark that

the story of Rima is also the story of those birds and of that ancient beauty which inevitably perish at the hands of barbarians, even those gold-giving and reddened hands of the collectors whom he hated. 198

Roberts' interpretation is echoed by W.J. Keith when he writes that Hudson's

accounts of the contemporary destruction of wild life [are] symbolized most painfully by the fate of Rima in Green Mansions.

- and, at a more general level, by Ruth Tomalin's comment that Rima is 'a symbol of wild nature threatened by man....'<sup>199</sup> This is certainly one level of the meaning involved; but given the symbolism of the bird and of Rima, Hudson is doing more than just saying something about the destruction of bird-life or the more general threat to 'wild nature'. The narrative embodies certain perceptions about the soul and about the paradisial in nature, in relation to 'darkness'. This should become clearer through the discussions to follow, of the figure of Rima and related matters, and of the theme of 'darkness' in the novel.

#### iv. Rima and the Thematics of Personal Being

Frank Swinnerton writes of Green Mansions:

Now as long as there is still a mystery in the tale; as long as the warbled notes which he hears in the fairy wood can be imagined as in some way supernatural, the book is odd and interesting. But from the moment when Rima is seen as a young girl the magic declines. (...) ... as soon as Abel finds her no spirit the movement of the book becomes mechanical; its invention grows feeble; it is contrived. 200

The judgement here rests on a false interpretation of the nature of the book and of Rima; Green Mansions is not a simple fantasy, and Rima is not a spirit residing in the fantasy-realm of a fairy wood. She is a mythopoeic figure, complexly spirit and girl, and the 'green mansions' are both a forest in Parahuari and a mythopoeic landscape, a setting for, and embodiment of, the paradisial and the terrible. Another reductionistic interpretation of Rima,

and of Hudson's writing in general, occurs in a recent pamphlet by Jason Wilson, W.H. Hudson: The Colonial's Revenge. Wilson's approach is that of psychologism; the text is reduced to a tissue of psychological and autobiographical motives and associations; he interprets Hudson's writing in terms of motives of revenge for being made to feel, as an Argentinian in England, a colonial and a 'barbarian'. This is how Wilson extends this approach to the interpretation of Rima:

Rima is Spanish for rhyme; in the novel she stands for frail, natural harmony, the long-lost original language of the mind that fuses woman's voice, bird-song and music. Poetry (Rima/rhyme) for Hudson was primarily a biological activity, not a cultural one; it was emotional overflow, the sheer pleasure of feeling alive. In this romance Rima is sacrificed to progress, to a civilization deaf to her song, for Rima is the last survivor of a lost race; Rima is the disappearing pRIMItVA, what came first (birdsong, woman/mother's voice, poetry, Spanish) for Hudson too. Rima lives on inside Abel as a memory, a ghost, as anima.

This hoarding of Rima as a memory is complex: part 'cherishing' his mother's memory and part Hudson's link with his buried past. This has linguistic roots. Although brought up speaking English, the Hudson family were surrounded by Spanish speakers. This made the Hudson children bilingual. As we mentioned, Hudson's written English was shaky [in his younger years], and although he lost contact with Spanish, the rest of the family stayed on and were assimilated into Argentina (moving from Hudson to Usōn); further his sister wrote to him in Spanish. 201

Wilson says that for Hudson, Spanish was 'the colonial's suppressed language', and the language associated with poetry.<sup>202</sup> This is why 'Rima is in Spanish and explains what she means':

... but the link between Spanish and Rima is obvious. Rima is the buried presence of his roots; the sadness behind Green Mansions is that Hudson was forced to negate this and bury it secretly as a memory. But it was his lifeline. 204

The argument is, I feel, both overingenious and flimsy. It reduces the novel to a frail allegory, where a person stands in for - implausibly enough - language and poetry conjoined with the past. Wilson sacrifices the full otherness of Rima's personal being to a theory of Hudson's mentality. With this in mind, it might be recalled that Rima's language is unknowable to Abel, and hence set in the narrative as a measure of Rima's mystery and

otherness. To reduce this to a question of Hudson's feelings about the Spanish language as a - not the, because he was born of American parents - language of his personal past, is to rob the novel of its fictional or imaginal autonomy. And if we were to take seriously Hudson's belief in poetry as a biological rather than a cultural activity, it would completely contradict Wilson's idea that Hudson thought of one language as being superior to another as a poetic medium.<sup>205</sup>

I want to contrast these examples of reductionistic interpretation of Rima with Guy Davenport's salient citing of Rima as a Koré or Persephone figure.<sup>206</sup> As such, she is symbolic of the soul and of nature (or of the soul in harmony with nature). Traditionally, Persephone is also a symbol of regeneration. (It will be remembered that the myth of Persephone

tells how the goddess was gathering flowers when the earth opened up and Pluto, the god of the underworld, appeared and carried her off to be his queen in hell. Her mother, Demeter, obtained this concession - that Persephone should spend two-thirds of the year with her (spring to autumn) and only one-third with her ravisher (winter).<sup>207</sup>

The myth revolves upon a correspondence between the soul and nature, 'the mystery of death and resurrection' being an aspect of plant-symbolism which can be applied to human life.)<sup>208</sup> In modern literature, the Persephone or Koré figure is 'our way of seeing the soul lost and in trouble', as Davenport writes.<sup>209</sup> Regarding the modern employment of the image of the dead Persephone (his subject here is actually Eudora Welty's The Optimist's Daughter, but could equally have been Green Mansions), Davenport adds:

How do we say this otherwise? That the spirit is dying in our time? That we live in a spiritual hell rather than a natural order? <sup>210</sup>

In a discussion of the related myth of Eurydice, he refers to the Eurydice/Koré/Persephone figure as 'a spirit lost to this world', which he defines as 'some liveliness, some principle of regeneration and care'.<sup>211</sup> Rima, as Persephone, is the soul oriented towards the spiritual and towards harmony with nature, as the Indians are oriented towards disharmony (in their

killing of Rima's beloved animals), and evil (in their hideous murder of Rima herself), and as Abel is oriented towards the 'darker' forces in the latter part of the book. But Rima's death is followed by no certainty of regeneration, rebirth, renewal; it is followed rather by dissonant and ghostly echoes in Abel's tormented soul.<sup>212</sup>

Rima stands in contrast with the Indians, as I have said, through the love she feels for the animals they hunt, stemming from some harmony with all living beings; and she acts in such a way as to frustrate their attempts at killing the animals until they grow to fear her and quit their hunting in the forest.<sup>213</sup> The reason for this is worth noting. The Indians make plans to kill Rima but one Indian accidentally kills instead one of his fellows with a blow-dart, and this is ascribed to some extra-human power on the part of Rima herself:

The wounded man threw himself down to die, and dying related that he had fired at the girl sitting up in a tree and that she had caught the arrow in her hand only to hurl it instantly back with such force and precision that it pierced his flesh just over his heart. He had seen it all with his own eyes, and his friend who had accidentally slain him believed his story and repeated it to the others. 214

Consequently they come to believe her to be the half-human child of a river-spirit. The narrative projects a picture of the Indians as possessed of a low intelligence; but it still seems significant that Rima has this particular effect on their imaginations. As I shall show, both Nuflo and Abel, in their different ways, see her as close to the supernatural. With Nuflo, the old man who poses as her grandfather when Abel first meets him, Rima's origins have a great deal to do with his feelings about her being. Nuflo had chanced upon Rima's mother in a cave at Riolama; at the time, he was the leader of a band of outlaws fleeing from justice.

... casting up his eyes Nuflo beheld, standing near and regarding them [i.e. he and his companions] with surprise and fear in her wide-open eyes, a woman of most wonderful appearance.... Her dark hair was like a cloud from which her face looked out, and her head was surrounded by an aureole like that of a saint in a picture, only more beautiful.



For, said Nuflo, a picture is a picture, and the other was a reality, which is finer. Seeing her he fell on his knees and crossed himself; and all the time her eyes, full of amazement and shining with such a strange splendour that he could not meet them, were fixed on him and not on the others; and he felt that she had come to save his soul, in danger of perdition owing to his companionship with men who were at war with God and wholly bad. 215

Nuflo is, as the narrative makes abundantly clear, a rascally figure, of a superstitious bent, and he is intended partly for comic and picturesque effect, partly also for the contrast between his grossness and Rima's altogether 'finer' being. At the same time, the epiphanic nature of his encounter with Rima's mother is obvious; and its effect on him - he abandons the company of his fellows, and devotes himself to caring for 'that sacred being who had appeared to him' - is telling.<sup>216</sup> The narrative projects the idea of some mysterious race, of which Rima is the probable sole survivor. Her strange language, and the sense we are given of her unique qualities, link her with an origin that is unknown and unknowable apart from the exception of Rima's mother, an exception that existed in the past. To Nuflo, Rima's relation to her mother is of great importance, for to him Rima's mother 'was now a very important person among the celestials', and Rima has intercessory powers with her mother.<sup>217</sup> Abel ascribes this to the effect of the girl's powerful personality and vivid faith acting on an ignorant and extremely superstitious mind. 218

But he admits that while she is actually petitioning her mother 'in heaven', the idea does not seem ridiculous:

Her rapt look; the intense conviction that vibrated in her ringing, passionate tones; the brilliant scorn with which she, a hater of bloodshed, one so tender towards all living things, even the meanest, bade him kill himself, and only hear first how her vengeance would pursue his deceitful soul into other worlds; the clearness with which she had related the facts of the case, disclosing the inmost secrets of her heart - all this had had a strange, convincing effect on me. Listening to her I was no longer the enlightened, the creedless man. She herself was so near to the supernatural that it seemed brought near me; indefinable feelings, which had been latent in me, stirred into life, and following the direction of her divine, lustrous eyes, fixed on the blue sky above, I seemed to see there another being like herself, a Rima glorified, leaning her pale, spiritual face to catch the winged

words uttered by her child on earth.... Doubtless it was a delusion; her mother was not really there above listening to the girl's voice. Still, in some mysterious way, Rima had become to me, even as to superstitious old Nuflo, a being apart and sacred.... 219

If we take the soul (as suggested above) as the person defined in terms of the capacity for orientation towards the spiritual (the infinite and eternal), Rima can be said to represent the soul, not only in its latent capacity, but in terms of an actual orientation towards the spiritual. 'She herself was so near to the supernatural...!', says Abel, who makes no hesitation in referring to her as 'sacred'; later in the narrative he speaks of 'Rima - the true and the visionary', lamenting, with her loss, 'all the mystic, unimaginable grace and loveliness and joy that had vanished....'<sup>220</sup> At one point, Hudson uses a flower-image to project the sense of transcendence which Rima evokes for Abel. Looking at Rima while she is unconscious, 'the mysterious loveliness of the still face' reminds him of an exceedingly perfect white flower he once saw in the Queneveta mountains.<sup>221</sup> The flower seems to endure in an everlasting freshness:

... it was, indeed, a flower, and, like other flowers, had life and growth, only with that transcendent beauty it had a different kind of life. Unconscious, but higher; perhaps immortal.... [Rima's face] had life, a life of so high a kind as to match with its pure, surpassing loveliness. I could almost believe that, like the forest flower, in this state and aspect it would endure for ever.... 222

The participation of personal being in eternal life is evoked in terms of Rima's 'pure, surpassing loveliness'; but even if the equation of this sense of the eternal that is vouchsafed through the physical being, with the everlastingness (in physical terms) of that being's loveliness, were not false, the actual fate of Rima gives a cruel irony to Abel's words, providing as it does a pessimistic image of the fate of the spiritual in nature and in personal being.

I want to isolate two factors in Hudson's presentation of Rima, to give some idea of how he establishes the singularity and 'otherness' of her

being. Both factors centre upon the question of identity: the first involves a quality of elusiveness, mutability or indefiniteness; the second relates to Rima's language. On the first occasion Abel actually sees Rima (this is prior to what I described above as his first direct confrontation with her, in as much as here he is observing her from a small distance), he describes her in such a way as to emphasise an indeterminate or indefinite quality:

Dark [her hair] appeared, but the precise tint was indeterminable, as was that of her skin, which looked neither brown nor white. Altogether, near to me as she actually was, there was a kind of mistiness in the figure which made it appear somewhat vague and distant, and a greenish grey seemed the prevailing colour. This tint I presently attributed to the effect of the sunlight falling on her through the green foliage; for once, for a moment, she raised herself... and then a gleam of unsubdued sunlight fell on her hair and arm, and the arm at that moment appeared of a pearly whiteness, and the hair, just where the light touched it, had a strange lustre and play of iridescent colour. 223

This impression of indefiniteness continues with her motions. But even when Abel sees her again, in circumstances where he can look at her more clearly, there is again a concentration in his descriptions on indefiniteness or elusiveness.

Her figure and features were singularly delicate, but it was her colour that struck me most, which indeed made her differ from all other human beings. The colour of the skin would be almost impossible to describe, so greatly did it vary with every change of mood - and the moods were many and transient - and with the angle on which the sunlight touched it, and the degree of light. 224

Her eyes are an elusive hue, 'glorified by the outward look of a bright, beautiful soul'.<sup>225</sup> This elusiveness projects at the level of physical appearance what is also apparent in Rima's behaviour: a resistance to any static form or order by which her being might be objectified. Aspects of this can be explained psychologically, in terms of Rima's ambivalence towards Abel because of the love she feels yet which causes her "'fear and trouble"'; but before the time that she has begun to feel love for him ('"When this white man had been for some days with us a strange thing [i.e.

the experience of love] happened to me..."', she says in prayer to her mother), Abel remarks upon how diverse her appearance, and behaviour, can be - contrasting her appearance at the time when she vented her wrath on him because of the serpent he wished to kill, with her appearance a short time afterwards in Nuflo's hut.<sup>226</sup> This mutable quality to her personal being exhibits itself also in animal-like alternation from rapid movement to extreme immobility:

... no longer restless and full of change in her expression, she was now as immovable as an alabaster statue; not a silken hair on her head trembled; her eyes were wide open, gazing fixedly before her; and when I looked into them they seemed to see and yet not to see me. They were like the clear, brilliant eyes of a bird, which reflect as in a miraculous mirror all the visible world but do not return our look, and seem to see us merely as one of the thousand small details that make up the whole picture. 227

Considered in relation to other factors - such as her harmony with nature, and her 'sublime' language - Rima's 'un-totalized' characteristics help to project a fundamental mystery to her personhood, rather than projecting any sense of 'disorder'. 'How various, how luminous, how divine she was!' Abel says of her, and the choice of terms points up the orientation involved clearly enough.<sup>228</sup>

I will turn to Rima's language now. Abel describes how

from her lips came a succession of those mysterious sounds which had first attracted me to her, swift and low and bird-like, yet with something so much higher and more soul-penetrating than any bird music.... To me, they would always be inarticulate sounds, affecting me like a tender spiritual music - a language without words suggesting more than words to the soul. 229

This language, unknown and unknowable (in so far as Abel never considers it possible to learn it, and with good reason, as its 'terms' - if they can be considered such - do not appear to be translatable into the only other language Rima knows, Spanish), with its powerful effect on the hearer, is a mark of Rima's divergence from the ordinary, and the source of her disappointment with Abel: Abel is unable to communicate with her on the

level at which she 'speaks'. In one passage, he asks her to call him by his Christian name:

"Is that your name? Oh, not your real name! Abel, Abel - what is that? It says nothing. I have called you by so many names - twenty, thirty - and no answer."

"Have you? But, dearest girl, every person has a name - one name he is called by. Your name, for instance, is Rima, is it not?"

"Rima! only Rima - to you? In the morning, in the evening... now in this place and in a little while where know I? ... in the night when you wake and it is dark, dark, and you see me all the same. Only Rima - oh, how strange!"

"What else, sweet girl? Your grandfather Nuflo calls you Rima."

"Nuflo?" She spoke as if putting a question to herself. "Is that an old man with two dogs that lives somewhere in the wood?" And then, with sudden petulance, "And you ask me to talk to you!" 230

In passing, I will note the stilted quality of some of Rima's dialogue, which is evident enough in this passage; this can perhaps be partially justified through the girl's isolation, her 'strangeness', and the possession of her own language as a prior language (which the awkwardness of her dialogue in 'Spanish', i.e. English, points up); but the stilted quality remains, and can be considered a flaw in the writing. Two interesting things emerge from this particular passage; first there is the same resistance to static forms of identification which I have noted before ('In the morning, in the evening [etc.]'); secondly and related to this, there is a concern with personal identity - here centring upon modes of address and modes of discourse. This concern comes out more strongly in another passage, following on from the one quoted above:

"Listen, Rima, you are like all beautiful things in the wood - flower, and bird, and butterfly, and green leaf, and frond, and little silky-haired monkey high up in the trees. When I look at you I see them all - all and more, a thousand times, for I see Rima herself. And when I listen to Rima's voice, talking in a language I cannot understand, I hear the wind whispering in the leaves, the gurgling running water, the bee among the flowers, the organ-bird singing far, far away in the shadows of the trees. I hear them all, and more, for I hear Rima. Do you understand me now? Is it I speaking to you - have I answered you - have I come to you?"

She glanced at me again, her lips trembling, her eyes now clouded with some secret trouble. "Yes," she replied in a whisper, and then, "No, it is not you," and after a moment, doubtfully, "Is it you?" 231

Abel speaks of the way that nature's discrete phenomena are in some sense

brought together in Rima's being, and her language, but also transcended by her and her speech; and in speaking of this, he comes close, at least, to showing authentic understanding, so that in speaking authentically of Rima, he has also spoken from (or disclosed) some part of his own authentic personhood. But, for Rima, he has not done so in a language adequate to that authenticity; hence, her indecisive, ambivalent response. Rima's ill-fated search for her own people at Riolama is directly connected with this theme of language; as she tells her mother, in prayer, "... when [Abel] caught me in his arms and compelled me to speak of [my feelings] he did not understand...."; hence her resolution to find her people, so that she can speak to them of her feelings of love and gain some understanding of that which she finds such a disturbing experience.<sup>232</sup> When Rima is able to accept Abel's embraces she says: "And all I wished to know was there - in you"; but in fact she still expects Abel to understand her language, and shows keen disappointment that he cannot.<sup>233</sup> As Abel comments:

... so long as she could not commune with me in that better language, which reflected her mind, there would not be that perfect union of soul she so passionately desired. <sup>234</sup>

(Given this, it is hard to believe that this 'perfect union' would ever have been effected. But Abel is prevented from any further attempt at 'perfect union' by the death of Rima.)

#### v. 'Darkness'

Having sketched in certain aspects of Rima's personal being, and provided some account of her symbolic or mythopoeic nature, I will look at the contrasting theme of soul-destructive 'darkness', i.e. those forces which destroy or deform the capacity for spiritual life in the person, and destroy the embodiments or symbols of the spirit on earth.

Hudson sets up the novel from its opening pages - in its Prologue, ostensibly written by an unnamed friend of Abel's - as a confession: it is the narration of what has been a closed, mysterious past. Abel narrates the history of his past to his friend after the latter has accused Abel of a one-sidedness in their friendship:

He [i.e. Abel] had had my whole life and mind open to him, to read it as in a book. His life was a closed and clasped volume to me. 235

This narration is to involve a confessing of guilt, and a witnessing of evil (as well, of course, as a witnessing of wonders). Significantly, the natives of Guayana are mentioned in the first few pages of the book (again, in the Prologue) in such a way as to signal their importance in the drama of Abel's past. 'The change in him was almost painful to witness,' says Abel's friend,

whenever our wandering talk touched on the subject of the aborigines, and of the knowledge he had acquired of their character and languages when living or travelling among them; all that made his conversation most engaging - the lively, curious mind, the wit, the gaiety of spirit tinged with a tender melancholy - appeared to fade out of it; even the expression of his face would change, becoming hard and set, and he would deal out facts in a dry mechanical way as if reading them in a book. 236

The Guayana Indians - specifically, Runi's tribe in Parahuari - are imaged as the embodiment of cruel and malign instincts; their murder of Rima is the realisation of this cruelty and malignity. Abel says of them:

You must not [think] that there is any sweetness in their disposition, any humane or benevolent instincts such as are found among the civilized nations; far from it. I regard them now, and, fortunately for me, I [always] regarded them... as beasts of prey, plus a cunning or low kind of intelligence vastly greater than that of the brute.... 237

Even of Cla-cla, Runi's ancient mother, an almost child-like figure in her senility, Abel says he knows

that with regard to the daughter of the Didi her feelings were as purely savage and malignant as those of Kua-kó [Runi's nephew]. 238

Again, he speaks elsewhere in the narrative of 'their savage, cruel instincts'.<sup>239</sup> The way the Indians function, then, in terms of the

narrative's imaginal economy is clear; they embody those cruel, malign instincts that threaten with destruction those concrete things or beings that provide a sense of beauty, sublimity, goodness, nobility - those things that are symbolised in the figure of Rima. It is unfortunate, however, that Hudson accomplishes this in such a way as to suggest racism. Abel's reference to his being 'of a superior race' to the Indians combines with other instances of racist arrogance, for example, his 'feeling of scorn at [Runi's] lower intelligence', and his revulsion at being embraced by 'a naked male savage' ('... to be hugged to his sweltering body was an unpleasant experience').<sup>240</sup> The account of the behaviour of a particular tribe is extended to a racially arrogant characterisation of so-called 'savages' as a whole.<sup>241</sup> This possibly is meant to reflect back on an arrogance in Abel, but it is extremely difficult to know if this is the intended effect or not.<sup>242</sup>

Abel's descent into 'darkness' - into the anti-paradisial - is far more terrifying in effect than anything disclosed of the Indians. When he suspects, but does not yet know, that the Indians have harmed Rima, he vows as he is taken to the Indian camp:

And if they spared me and had not spared that other sacred life interwoven with mine, the time would come when they would find too late, that they had taken to their bosom a worse devil than themselves. 243

Abel finds that,

something new and strange had come into my life; that a new nature, black and implacable, had taken the place of the old. 244

Having found out from Kua-kó of Rima's murder, Abel turns to revenge. While escaping from the Indian camp, he kills Kua-kó. All feelings vanish 'except a terrible raging desire to spill his accursed blood....',<sup>245</sup> When he watches the dying Indian's blood spurt up from the thrust of his knife, he experiences 'a feeling of savage joy'.<sup>246</sup> Abel pursues his revenge by stirring up disquiet against Runi in the village of his enemy, Managa,



working upon the latter's fear of an attack by Runi; but Hudson underlines the spiritual nature of Abel's 'descent', of which his intrigues with Managa form only a visible sign, by having Abel recount how he cursed God for allowing fate to be as cruel as it has proved in Rima's destruction: his curses or 'cries', he says, 'did not touch or come near' God, but they hurt Abel himself. As he puts it:

... so did I wilfully bruise my own soul, and know that these wounds I gave myself would not heal. 247

Accordingly, he speaks of this as 'the beginning of the blackest period of my life'.<sup>248</sup> This 'secret dark chapter' of his life to which he is confessing, he characterises as a 'period of moral insanity', and in so doing refuses to take refuge in the notion of mental instability.<sup>249</sup> Indeed, he insists that his mind was clear, that he knew his own purposes. In carrying out his plan against Runi and his tribe, he wants to show his hatred of God,

the unknown being, personal or not, that is behind nature, in whose existence I believed. I was still in revolt: I would hate Him, and show my hatred by being like Him, as he appears to us reflected in [the] mirror of Nature. Had he given me good gifts - the sense of right and wrong and sweet humanity? The beautiful sacred flower He had caused to grow in me I would crush ruthlessly; its beauty and fragrance and grace would be dead for ever; there was nothing evil, nothing cruel and contrary to my nature, that I would not be guilty of, glorying in my guilt. 250

We can see in this passage the essential nature of 'darkness' or evil - the negation of goodness and truth and beauty, and the establishment of the inverse of these principles. It includes elements that are related to the ethical only through the sense of injury done to the soul, involving terror, obscenity, and madness - as we shall see in the development of Abel's period of 'darkness'.

His initial phase, this time of 'moral insanity' during which he pursues his malign purpose in Managa's village, lasts for almost two months. At the end of it, the slaughter is accomplished - the whole of Runi's tribe

is destroyed. Abel is brought to his senses, so to speak, by

the sight of an old woman, lying where she had been struck down, the fire of the blazing house lighting her wide-open glassy eyes and white hair dabbled in blood.... 251

(The old woman is Cla-cla, who had once taken delight in Abel's presence in her son's village.) It is as if this specific detail gives him back his sight - that is, it is as if he has been 'blind', engulfed in 'darkness'. His response to this recovery of perception is to retreat into the darkness of the forest, overcome with the anguish of remorse and fearful of coming upon another person face to face. Although he has regained his sight in that he is now able to see the reality of what he has done for the terrible thing that it is, he does, indeed, retreat not just into the physical darkness of the forest, but into the 'darkness' and terror of his mind and soul. This retreat is endured, but fearfully. The very darkness of his environment, physical analogue of the darkness of the anti-paradise in which he resides at a spiritual level, is so difficult to bear that he becomes caught in compulsive behaviour regarding the need for light:

... I found a supply of Haima gum, and eagerly began picking it from the tree; not that it could be used, but the thought of the brilliant light it gave was so strong in my mind that mechanically I gathered it all. (...) I envied the fireflies their natural lights, and ran about in the dusk to capture a few and hold them in the hollow of my two hands, for the sake of their cold, fitful flashes. 252

He also becomes dominated by the difficult business of procuring food, and by the appetite that underlies it, an appetite obscene in its demands. He raids the nests of those birds that were so close to Rima; he kills a snake to eat (as I have already discussed). He descends to roasting

some huge white grubs which I had found in the rotten wood of a prostrate trunk. The sight of these great grubs had formerly disgusted me; but they tasted good to me now, and stayed my hunger.... 253

Through this domination by appetite, and the grotesque, demeaning character of the domination, Hudson provides a sign of Abel's degeneration:

Once my soul hungered after knowledge; I took delight in fine thoughts finely expressed; I sought them carefully in printed books: now only

this vile bodily hunger, this eager seeking for grubs and honey, and ignoble war with little things [i.e. 'waspyish' insects, and also birds]! 254

Whereas Rima evoked the paradisial through her closeness to the supernatural and her harmony with nature; and whereas before Rima's death Abel gained some intimation, at least, of the paradisial through Rima and through his feeling for nature; now Abel is reduced to the level of an absorption with a 'vile bodily hunger', and to a disharmonious relationship with the wild creatures of Rima's forest. There is a Rima of this anti-paradise, too; a phantasmal Rima, haunting Abel's soul. At first, this ghostly Rima brings him a phantasy of fruition:

To be with Rima again - my lost Rima recovered - mine, mine at last! No longer the old vexing doubt now - "You are you and I am I - why is it?" - the question asked when our souls were near together, like two raindrops side by side, drawing irresistibly nearer, ever nearer: for now they had touched and were not two, but one inseparable drop, crystallised beyond change, nor to be disintegrated by time, nor shattered by death's blow, nor resolved by any alchemy. 255

So it seems - for a time. But various events bring back his anguish. For example, one evening he finds an extremely beautiful moth; opening the door of his hut to let it out into the night, he addresses it:

... "O night-wanderer of the pale, beautiful wings, go forth, and should you by chance meet Rima somewhere in the shadowy depths, revisiting her old haunts, be my messenger - " Thus much had I spoken, when the frail thing loosened its hold to fall without a flutter, straight and swift, into the white blaze beneath. 256

The moth repeats Rima's death; as if the world of nature were intimately involved in Rima's ruin (and for Abel, at this point, it is); with a creature of the aerial element significantly the enactor of this repetition. Abel's anguished soul is caught up in a web of haunted and despairing ideas centring on the question of identity - the theme that was so crucial in his relationship to Rima. Staring into the forest pool,

where Rima would look no more to see herself so much better than in the small mirror of her lover's pupil, it showed me a gaunt, ragged man with a tangled mass of black hair falling over his shoulders, the bones of his face showing through the dead-looking, sun-parched skin, the sunken eyes with a gleam in them that was like insanity. 257

An inner voice tells him he is going insane.

... rage and desperation drove me to an act which only seemed to prove that the hateful voice had prophesied truly. Taking up a stone I hurled it down on the water to shatter the image I saw there, as if it had been no faithful reflection of myself, but a travesty, cunningly made of enamelled clay or some other material, and put there by some malicious enemy to mock me. 258

This sense of being other than one's true self - a deformed, 'darkened' travesty - is characteristic of an anti-paradise in which 'I [was] no longer I, in a universe where she was not, and God was not.'<sup>259</sup> And if a travesty has taken the place of the true self, then that self has become (even if temporarily) subject to a negation, like God and Rima. This is the basic sense of the inscription Abel puts on the urn in which he has placed Rima's remains: Sin vos y siu dios y mi.<sup>260</sup> Curiously, the letters of the inscription also form the spots or blotches of a serpent's form; as if this extravagant motto - as Abel calls it - should best be served by the ambivalent symbolism associated with the serpent. The anguish over identity plays into a dissonant relation to the image of Rima in his soul. Abel asks himself if Rima did not say he was beautiful, and is answered by the interior voice he heard before at the pool:

"Long ago, when the soul that looked from your eyes was not the accursed thing it is now. Now Rima would start at the sight of them; now she would fly in terror from their insane expression!" 261

He becomes haunted by waking visions of both Rima and Nuflo; in the most significant of them, Rima appears as a being suffering from great sorrow because of Abel's fault or sin. She tells him he must undo what he has done and yet tells him he cannot do so:

"You cannot, Abel, you cannot. That which you have done is done, and yours must be the penalty and the sorrow - yours and mine - yours and mine - yours and mine." 262

Abel acknowledges the phantasmal nature of this vision - 'all her words,' he says, 'were woven out of my own brain.'<sup>263</sup> Yet, he continues, the vision was

more real than reality - real as my crime and vain remorse and death to come. It was, indeed, Rima returned to tell me that I that loved her had been more cruel to her than her 'cruellest enemies; for they had but tortured and destroyed her body with fire, while I had cast this shadow on her soul - this sorrow transcending all sorrows, darker than death, immitigable, eternal. 264

At the end of the book Abel is to conclude that 'outside of the soul, there is no forgiveness in heaven or earth for sin'; and having reached the stage of being able to forgive himself, he feels that should Rima re-appear before him,

I know that her divine eyes would no longer refuse to look into mine, since the sorrow which seemed eternal and would have slain me to see would not now be in them. 265

But why should Abel's actions have caused a sorrow 'transcending all sorrow'? Is it because - contrary to his former feeling that their souls had become united - the evil he has perpetuated has placed him, for a time, in a realm contrary to Rima's own spiritual realm? At one point, Abel calls himself 'A new Ahasuerus' - that is, the Wandering Jew, who cursed Christ during His Passion - 'cursed by inexpiable crime....'<sup>266</sup> And the burden of living in the shadow (so to speak) of Rima's ghost is evident in the passage where he exclaims when he has killed an animal for food:

"O to be out of this wood - away from this sacred place - to be anywhere where killing is not murder!" 267

Short of that point at which he can find forgiveness in himself for his crime, he can only live in disharmony with the world Rima embodied.<sup>268</sup>

The negativity Hudson explores through the Indians and through Abel is also explored in the treatment of fate, or destiny - the fact or process (as I have said above) of one thing rather than some other thing coming-to-pass. This theme is given comic adumbration in Nuflo's discoursing on

the divine government of the world - 'God's politics' - and its manifest imperfections, or in other words, the manifold abuses which from time to time had been allowed to creep into it. 269

Abel assumes - not 'manifold abuses' to which Providence has been submitted -

but a God who allows death and destruction, in a way that is 'cruel beyond all cruelty', as in Rima's death.<sup>270</sup> Abel calls it 'this law of nature and of necessity, against which all revolt is idle', relating it to God as manifest 'in the horrible workings of nature'.<sup>271</sup> When Abel resolves to commit evil (in causing the slaughter of Runi's tribe), it is because of the evil he sees in nature, and which, at this point, he ascribes to God:

I was still in revolt: I would hate Him, and show my hatred by being like Him, as He appears to us reflected in that mirror of Nature. 272

We can add to this, although it is not directly stated except in narrative incident, the way evil works through chance; for example, it is through the chance meeting with some travelling natives during the journey of Abel, Nuflo, and Rima to Riolama that Runi hears that they have left the forest near Ytaioa - and this will create the circumstances through which Rima is killed by the Indians. This, then, is the anti-paradisial current in Green Mansions - the fact that Rima,

this bright being, like no other in its divine brightness, so long in the making, [should become] now no more than a dead leaf, a little dust, lost and forgotten for ever.... 273

But this counter-movement renders the epiphanic, the supernatural, problematic and elusive - within the economy of Hudson's imaginal world - rather than destroying it. At the close of the penultimate chapter, when he is getting ready to leave the forest, Abel's memory of Rima is still of her as 'the true and visionary'; and for keeping faith with the spiritual image of Rima, perhaps, he is vouchsafed an epiphany:

The sky was cloudless and the forest wet as if rain had fallen; it was only a heavy dew, and it made the foliage look pale and hoary in the early light. And the light grew, and a whispering wind sprung as I walked through the wood; and the fast-evaporating moisture was like a bloom on the feathery fronds and grass and rank herbage; but on the higher foliage it was like a faint iridescent mist - a glory above the trees. The everlasting beauty and freshness of nature was over all again, as I had so often seen it with joy and adoration before grief and dreadful passions had dimmed my vision. 274

My treatment of the symbolic aspects of Hudson's narrative should give some

idea of the imaginal richness involved; the ability to make deeply-felt experience appear concrete and 'lived', as shown, for example, in this descriptive passage, can be seen as a way of embodying such richness; and together these qualities outweigh what faults the book has. Green Mansions is the summit of his life as a writer of fiction.

## Chapter Seven

The remaining fiction that Hudson published is honourable, but minor in range. These last works, 'Dead Man's Plack' and 'An Old Thorn', were published together in one volume; they have in common a certain grave simplicity, but little else, not even length ('Dead Man's Plack' is far longer than 'An Old Thorn'). 'Dead Man's Plack' has a kind of stark power, spoiled at times by a wordiness in some of Elfrida's soliloquies, that is similar to that of traditional ballads; 'An Old Thorn' has a little of the quality of a folk-tale, seemingly artless in its simplicity: yet impressive in the submerged artistry with which Hudson organises the details, and touching in the portrayal of emotion and the sympathy with which he deals with the main characters.<sup>275</sup> As far as subject-matter goes, 'Dead Man's Plack' deals with 'the fact and effect of sin as a reality in human life', as John T. Frederick has said, while, to quote Hudson himself, the subject of 'An Old Thorn' is 'the survival of something like tree-worship in England'.<sup>276</sup> In exploring these themes of sin and of the supernatural in nature, Hudson was thus continuing to deal with two of the concerns of Green Mansions (though in Green Mansions the supernatural in nature is dealt with more strictly in terms of epiphany).

The circumstances of Hudson's writing 'Dead Man's Plack' are worth noting. In writing to Garnett, he simply says that,

just lately, when the desire to work became too strong I set out to do a small thing - a tragical story...<sup>277</sup>

He says in another letter that this story was 'a subject most unsuitable for me, which was forced on me so to speak....'<sup>278</sup> He also comments on the drawing of Elfrida's personal being:



What I feel about this thing is that I haven't succeeded in producing the effect aimed at in the character of the woman as a whole and [the] sole interest is in that - the woman who was capable of a horrible crime and who was yet essentially noble in spirit. 279

In both the 'Preamble' and the 'Postscript' to the story, however, Hudson elaborates on the statement to Garnett that the tale was 'forced' on him in a surprising way. He relates in the 'Preamble' that the story of Elfrida caught hold of him,

not as an old story in old books, but as an event, or series of events, now being re-enacted [i.e. in a sort of vision] before my very eyes. I actually saw and heard it all, from the very beginning to the dreadful end; and this is what I am now going to relate. But whether or not I shall in my relation be in a close accord with what history tells us I know not, nor does it matter in the least. ... those who have been brought to the Gate of Remembrance are independent of written documents, chronicles and histories, and of the weary task of separating the false from the true. They have better sources of information. For I am not so vain as to imagine for one moment that without such external aid I am able to make shadows breathe, revive the dead, and know what silent mouths once said. 280

Beyond the sense that the narrative has in some sense been 'given', that it is 'inspired' in nature, the narrator being, so to speak, taken out of himself in the writing of it, there is a specific notion of more-or-less direct 'dictation' here, as Hudson asserts in the 'Postscript', stating that 'Something, or, more likely, Somebody, gave me her history....',<sup>281</sup>

Moreover, he is willing to posit that it may have been Elfrida herself who dictated her history to him. This is the more astonishing given that it is one of Hudson's least cautious references to post-mortem survival. He also uses this theory of the origin of his narrative to explain the 'veiled' or incomplete character of Elfrida's personal history, that he had alluded to in the letter to Garnett. After telling a (supposedly factual) story of a female ghost seen at Wherwell in contemporary times, he says:

If Elfrida then, albeit still in purgatory, is able to revisit this scene of her early life and the site of that tragedy in the forest, it does not seem to me altogether improbable that she herself made the revelation I have written. And if this be so, it would account for the veiled character conveyed in the narrative. For even after ten centuries it may well be that all the coverings have not yet been

removed, that although she has been dropping them one by one for ages, she has not yet come to the end of them. Until the very last covering, or veil, or mist is removed it would be impossible for her to be absolutely sincere, to reveal her inmost soul with all that is most dreadful in it. 282

There is no hint of anything other than a literal notion of dictated revelation, connected with the after-life, in this 'Postscript', but in a letter to Garnett from this same time, Hudson makes a related statement which seems more typically ambiguous:

... we ever listen to the dead speaking to us or to others and ever project ourselves into the ground and speak for ourselves.... 283

As stated above, 'Dead Man's Plack' is a narration of fault - of stain, or guilt. The title probably means 'Dead Man's Place', and refers to the stone cross at Wherwell ('a village on the Test'), marking the place where the Saxon king Edgar killed his friend Earl Athelwold because of the latter's treachery concerning Elfrida.<sup>284</sup> Athelwold had deceived the king, telling him that Elfrida was unfit to become his queen, his purpose being to marry Elfrida himself. Elfrida's reaction to Edgar's brutal slaying of Athelwold in the forest reveals a passionate nature capable of cruel emotions:

O perfect master of dissimulation [she is referring to Edgar], all the more do I love and worship you for dealing with him as he dealt with you and with me; caressing him with flattering words until the moment came to strike and slay. And I love you all the more for making your horse trample on him as he lay bleeding his life out on the ground. 285

Athelwold's deceit had robbed Elfrida of queenship; and by now being able to marry Edgar, she is able to realize her desire, 'which is power and splendour'.<sup>286</sup> This absorption in 'power and splendour' is frustrated and shaken into desolation when Edgar dies suddenly of a fever, and her foster-son Edward, a boy of twelve, is crowned under the aegis of her bitter enemy, Archbishop Dunstan.

... there was not in all England a more miserable woman than Elfrida the queen. For after this defeat she could hope no more; her power was

gone past recovery - all that made her life beautiful and glorious was gone. 287

Three years after Edward's crowning, in March of 978, Edward happens to come to Elfrida's castle, and Elfrida orders her men to detain him, resulting in the youth being killed. The images of Edward's end come to haunt her with remorse (and remind her of her complicity in Athelwold's murder):

Could she then believe that she was guiltless in God's sight? Alas! ... she dared not affirm it. She was guiltless only in the way that she had been guiltless of Athelwold's murder; had she not rejoiced at the part she had had in that act? 288

Held to blame by the populace for Edward's murder, and denounced by Dunstan, the queen fears punishment; but when no earthly punishment is forthcoming,

this dreadful thought that she was answerable to God weighed more and more heavily on her. Nor could she escape by day or night from the persistent image of the murdered boy. It haunted her like a ghost in every room, and when she climbed to a tower to look out it was to see his horse rushing madly away dragging his bleeding body over the moor. 289

She is able for a time to take some refuge in nature, a nature devoid of other people whose 'passions and hopes and fears and dreams and ambition' have, with her own, 'become interfused' with the landscapes they inhabited.

Now it was as if an obscuring purple mist had been blown away, leaving the prospect sharp and clear to her sight as it had never appeared before. 290

Hudson is able to sketch deftly the landscape of this seclusion which the Downs provide, contrasting as a landscape of peace and beauty with the torment of Elfrida's soul, and giving her soul a certain ease. The freedom from human infringement is also a freedom from God, for she sees God as dwelling where men dwell, in places with churches and religious houses. Yet she is unable to rid herself of the thought of judgement, and for a time she often goes to Stonehenge to meditate there amongst the stones, and pray to God through (as she believes) the intermediary of her dead foster-son.

Closing her eyes she would summon the familiar image and vision of the murdered boy, always coming so quickly, so vividly, that she had

brought herself to believe that it was not a mere creation of her own mind and of remorse, a memory, but that he was actually there. 291

Hudson makes effective symbolic use of the image of clear water as a contrast to the 'darkness', the stain, of Elfrida's guilt. Her possibility of release emerges, not from any intervention from her dead foster-son, but through the person of Editha, who serves for a while as a maid to the queen. Elfrida asks herself concerning Editha,

What was it in this face... that held her and gave some rest to her tormented spirit? It reminded her of that crystal stream of sweet and bitter memories, at Wherwell, on which she used to gaze and in which she used to dip her hands, then to press the wetted hands to her lips. It also reminded her of an early morning sky, seen beyond and above the green dew-wet earth, so infinitely far away, so peaceful with a peace that was not of this earth.

It was not then merely its beauty that made this face so much to her, but something greater behind it, some inner grace, the peace of God in her soul. 292

At Wherwell she had felt shut away in a

castle in the wilderness, a solitude where from an upper window I look upon leagues of forest, a haunt of wild animals. 293

When Athelwold was away she would sink into melancholy, relieved only by the 'companionship' of the hearth by which she would sit, and the stream where she took her walks. Now she is shut up in the sin-darkened castle of her soul, and the 'water'-like nature of Edith's personhood, the limpid, shining quality of her soul, free from the impediment, the stain, of sin, similarly - but at a more spiritual level - gives her relief. The limpidity - the clearness - of fresh water, in standing over against the image of the queen's stained or darkened soul, brings with it an unstated yet obviously implicit association of ablution. Editha - a person of noble birth, who has become the queen's maid for the (pious) purpose of influencing her - both gives her hope of salvation, but also causes a 'deep, unbroken sadness' to open up by saying something which the queen interprets as meaning that her life after death will long consist of dreadful, desolate solitude until she receives 'the final pardon and be admitted to rest in a green and shaded

place'.<sup>294</sup> At the end, having founded an abbey at Wherwell and retired there as a nun, Elfrida gives herself to the Test, the stream where she had contemplated drowning herself when married to Athelwold, and which she has come to identify - to equate - with Editha ('... the stream and Editha were one').<sup>295</sup> Faced with a long, dreadful future of purification, and of separation from the soul of Editha who has come to mean so much to her, Elfrida commits herself in death to the natural correspondence of Editha's limpid soul.

Thus ended Elfrida's darkened life; nor did it seem an unfit end; for it was as if she had fallen into the arms of the maiden who had in her thoughts become one with the stream - the saintly Editha through whose sacrifice and intercession she had been saved from death everlasting. <sup>296</sup>

'An Old Thorn' may not be, as May Sinclair believed, Hudson's best work - it is too slight a piece of writing for that - but it is a very effective and unusual story.

The suggestion of supernatural, god-like power inhering in the tree - in the mind of Johnnie Budd, the central character of 'An Old Thorn' - can be glossed by reference to the ontological dimensions trees possess in traditional symbolism. J.E. Cirlot remarks on the frequent association between gods and trees in mythology, commenting that 'They express a kind of "elective correspondence"'. He continues:

In its most general sense, the symbolism of the tree denotes the life of the cosmos: its consistence, growth, proliferation, generative and regenerative processes. It stands for inexhaustible life, and is therefore equivalent to a symbol of immortality. According to Eliade, the concept of 'life without death' stands, ontologically speaking, for 'absolute reality' and, consequently, the tree becomes a symbol of this absolute reality.... <sup>297</sup>

Admittedly Hudson does not make this symbolism explicit; but concentrates instead on the notion of mysterious - at bottom, numinous - life. Thus Hudson testifies to the aesthetic 'strangeness' of the hawthorn-tree of the narrative (near the village of Ingden, on the South Wiltshire Downs),

commenting on its impression of great age, and on a more fundamental mysterious power of influence. He writes:

Certainly the thorn had strangeness. Its appearance as to height was deceptive; one would have guessed it eighteen feet; measuring it I was surprised to find it only ten. It has four separate boles, springing from one root, leaning a little away from each other, the thickest just a foot in circumference. The branches are few, beginning at about five feet from the ground, the foliage thin, the leaves throughout the summer stained with grey, rust-red, and purple colour. Though so small and exposed to the full fury of every wind that blows over that vast naked down, it has yet an ivy growing on it - the strangest of the many strange ivy-plants I have seen. It comes out of the ground as two ivy trunks on opposite sides of the stoutest bole, but at a height of four feet from the surface the two join and ascend the tree as one round iron-coloured and iron-hard stem, which goes curving and winding snakewise among the branches as if with the object of roping them to save them from being torn off by the winds. Finally, rising to the top, the long serpent stem opens out in a flat disc-shaped mass of close-packed branches and twigs densely set with small round leaves, dark dull green and tough as parchment. 298

He also says:

It struck me that after all the most interesting thing about the thorn was its appearance of great age, and this aspect I had... been told had continued for at least a century, probably for a much longer time. It produced a reverent feeling in me such as we experience at the sight of some ancient stone monument. But the tree was alive, and because of its life the feeling was perhaps stronger than in the case of a granite cross or cromlech or other memorial of antiquity. 299

But this reverence-producing impression of enduring vigour of life, together with an aesthetic sense of 'strangeness', are not the only, nor the main, factor in the tree's fascination. Other trees, he has found, have a strong effect or influence on the human soul; and he has also

formed the opinion that in many persons the sense of a strange intelligence and possibility of power in such trees is not a mere transitory state but an enduring influence which profoundly affects their whole lives. 300

To put it another way, Hudson is concerned here with animism, i.e. the belief in the supernatural in natural things.<sup>301</sup> The story of Johnnie Budd which he goes on to relate, and which forms the narrative as such of 'An Old Thorn', illustrates a surviving belief in animism. He begins by narrating the events leading up to Johnnie's downfall, in the year of 1821 - his

stealing of a wether to feed his hungry family (Johnnie being without work) and his confession. While being taken to Salisbury for trial, Johnnie implores the constable to stop the cart for a moment, to let him out by the old hawthorn; and Johnnie drops to his knees beside it.... Hudson then shifts back to Johnnie's childhood, relating how Johnnie had been caught climbing the thorn by a strange man on horseback, who tells him:

"Do you know, boy, that if you hurt it, it will hurt you? It stands fast here with its roots in the ground and you - you can go away from it, you think. 'Tis not so; something will come out of it and follow you wherever you go and hurt and break you at last." 302

Hudson then shifts the story forward in time, to Johnnie's nineteenth year and the story of his awkward passion for the village girl Marty and their eventual marriage - it is a story told with great sympathy, and effectively touching. The thought of the hurt done to the tree in his childhood comes back to Johnnie one day; and Marty suggests they make it an offering in propitiation, but the day for doing so is put off and finally allowed to lapse altogether. The thought that the tree - or 'something from the tree which had followed him' - has indeed broken him, causes his strange request on the way to Salisbury.<sup>303</sup> But no belated act of reverence in asking 'forgiveness' has any effect; the judge sentences Johnnie to be hanged.<sup>304</sup> Hudson also, in a mode of writing remarkable for its compression and its grave simplicity, registers sympathetically the unreal quality the trial has for Johnnie - an uneducated country labourer - and the thoughts to which his bemused mind turns, of his wife and family, his village... and above all, the tree. After the sentence has been passed and he is back in his cell, he continues to see in his mind the old thorn:

Never before had he seen it in that vivid way in which it appeared to him now, standing alone in the vast green down, under the wide sky, its four separate boles leaning a little way from each other, like the middle ribs of an open fan, holding up the wide-spread branches, the thin, open foliage, the green leaves stained with rusty brown and purple; and the ivy, rising like a slender black serpent of immense length, springing from the roots, winding upwards, and in and out,

among the grey branches, holding them together, and resting its round, dark cluster of massed leaves on the topmost boughs. That green disc was the ivy-serpent's flat head and was the head of the whole tree, and there it had its eyes, which gazed for ever over the whole downs, watching all living things, cattle and sheep and birds and men in their comings and goings; and although fast-rooted in the earth, following them, too, in all their ways, even as it had followed him, to break him at last. 305

This vision in which Johnnie sees the tree and its ivy in a numinous, mythopoeic light, draws upon the 'negative' aspects of serpent symbolism (i.e. the serpent's ability to inflict injury). The life-force symbolism shared by both plant-life and serpent enables Hudson to use the image of the ivy in this way (that is, in a way that goes beyond the bare similarity of shape), and to extend to plant-life the ambivalent symbolism of the snake. 'An Old Thorn' re-affirms Hudson's concern with the supernatural in nature, but it simultaneously underlines the 'darker', pessimistic dimension to his vision.



NOTES

1. 'Pelino Viera's Confession' was first published in the Cornhill Magazine, in 1883; and was included in the American edition of El Ombú, Tales of the Pampas (1916).
2. John T. Frederick - who characterises it as 'a feeble piece of fiction' - surmises that it may have been written before Hudson left South America in 1874, although it was not published until 1888 (in an obscure journal called Youth). (William Henry Hudson, pp. 61, 62.) For brief characterisations of both Ralph Herne and Fan, see my Introduction (Section 2, p. 15).
3. LWHH, p. 200.
4. LWHH, p. 63.
5. LWHH, p. 208. (Letter of July 1920.)
6. 'Tecla' is included with all Hudson's other extant poems in both the 1923 edition of A Little Boy Lost and the 1924 edition of Dead Man's Plack and An Old Thorn. None of the poetry can be considered on the same level as the best of Hudson's prose.
7. In a letter to R.B. Cunninghame Graham, Hudson write: 'I didn't send you or Mrs. Bontine [i.e. Cunninghame Graham's mother] A Little Boy Lost because it was only a very little boy's book and I suspected that it was not a particularly good one.' (Letters to R.B. Cunninghame Graham, p. 89. Letter of January 1906.)
8. Keith's level of sensitivity to the poetic and visionary qualities of the non-fiction, makes his chapter on Hudson an outstanding contribution to Hudson studies.
9. LWHH, p. 189. (Letter of October 1918.)
10. The qualities I have indicated as typical of Cunninghame Graham can be clearly seen in the recent selection, The South American Sketches of R.B. Cunninghame Graham, ed. John Walker; Norman, Oklahoma, 1978.
11. Ruth Tomalin's Introduction to South American Romances, p. xvi. For Hudson's admiration of Melville, see Morley Roberts, W.H. Hudson: A Portrait, p. 144.
12. Ruth Tomalin, op. cit., p. xvi.
13. Harry Levin has explored this theme of 'darkness' in Melville, in his book The Power of Blackness: Hawthorne, Poe, Melville. Levin borrows the phrase 'the power of blackness' from Melville himself, as he explains: 'Applying the touchstone of Shakespeare's tragedies to Hawthorne's tales, the crucial trait that fixed and fascinated Melville was what he designated the "power of blackness" - a power which "derives its force from its appeals to that Calvinistic sense of Innate Depravity and Original Sin, from whose visitations, in some

shape or other, no deeply thinking mind is always and wholly free". (The Power of Blackness, London, 1963, p. 33.) I have not borrowed this phrase for the present discussion, because Levin intends a greater range of negative vision by the phrase than is useful here; i.e. there is a 'blackness' in Poe that Levin characterises in terms of 'the narrowing yet bottomless abyss that underlies the human condition', yet this 'blackness' differs from what I am referring to as 'darkness' because there is no genuine spiritual dimension involved for Poe. (Ibid, p. 128.)

14. Harold Beaver, Introduction to Herman Melville, Moby Dick; Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1972, p. 25.
15. Ibid, p. 28.
16. Moby Dick, p. 262. See also p. 283: '... all evil, to crazy Ahab, [was] visibly personified and made practically assailable in Moby Dick.'
17. Ibid, pp. 295-96. Hudson was sufficiently interested in Melville's meditation on whiteness to discuss it at some length in Idle Days in Patagonia (Chap. VIII, 'Snow, and the Quality of Whiteness').
18. Another author who can be mentioned in this context is Joseph Conrad. Conrad's Heart of Darkness projects the sense of 'an implacable force brooding over an inscrutable intention' permeating the wilderness in which the novel is set; making the protagonist Kurtz look into his own soul, and find there 'an impenetrable darkness' of insane passions, madness for power, and total despair. (Heart of Darkness; Harmondsworth, 1973, pp. 48, 99.) There is a certain resemblance between Kurtz's condition, and Abel's discovery of the 'darkness' within himself.
19. I am drawing on Paul Ricoeur's work, in The Symbolism of Evil (tr. Emerson Buchanan, Boston, 1969).
20. Ibid, p. 165.
21. On this 'substructure', see The Symbolism of Evil, p. 5.
22. I am using 'imaginal' in this study simply in the sense of that which pertains to the imagination.
23. Ruth Tomalin, W.H. Hudson: A Biography, p. 120.
24. J.E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 374. See also p. 298.
25. By 'soul', I mean the person defined in terms of the capacity for orientation towards, or participation in, the spiritual.
26. I might also mention here the grisly little story of a boy who transforms himself into a wryneck - already referred to in Part One, Chapter Six - that Hudson tells in Birds in Town and Village. The theme of immortality that is also involved in the symbolism of metamorphosis is invoked by the boy's quest for a way of evading death; and the extremity of the boy's mental condition recalls the interest in extreme states of mind and soul Hudson pursues in Green Mansions.

27. Simone Weil, Gravity and Grace, p. 135.
28. With regard to the concern with place, I would like to note Cirlot's discussion of landscape in terms of 'expressions' of being that correspond to modalities of consciousness (A Dictionary of Symbols, pp. 180, 266); and to Paul Ricoeur's notion that
- Cosmos and Psyche are the two poles of the same 'expressivity'; I express myself in expressing the world; I explore my own sacrality in deciphering that of the world.
- (The Symbolism of Evil, p. 13.)
29. Robert Hamilton, W.H. Hudson: The Vision of Earth, p. 50.
30. Ibid, pp. 50-51.
31. Hamilton admittedly acknowledges that the priest in 'Marta Riquelme' shows little in common with Hudson himself.
32. Ibid, p. 58.
33. Ibid, p. 52.
34. Ibid, p. 52.
35. Ibid, pp. 52-53.
36. Ibid, pp. 53, 56.
37. Richard E. Haymaker, From Pampas to Hedgerows and Downs, p. 319.
38. Ibid, pp. 317, 318.
39. Ibid, p. 319.
40. Ibid, pp. 340, 343-44.
41. Ibid, p. 336.
42. Ibid, pp. 344-45. I would quarrel with the characterisation of Green Mansions as a 'fantasy'; it would be better termed a visionary romance.
43. John T. Frederick, William Henry Hudson, p. 43.
44. Ibid, p. 40.
45. David Garnett, Great Friends, p. 27.
46. John T. Frederick, op. cit., p. 45.
47. Ibid, p. 54.
48. He admittedly does refer, at one point, to 'the all-but-supernatural character of Rima' but adds 'as first seen'. (Ibid, p. 53.)
49. Ibid, p. 48.

50. Ibid, p. 51.
51. Ibid, pp. 54, 55.
52. Ibid, p. 55. I think this fails to do justice to the full force of the book's 'darkness', as my discussion of Green Mansions will show.
53. Hudson, The Purple Land; London, 1927, p. vi. Hereafter abbreviated as PL.
54. Hudson, BM, p. 9. The Banda is what is now known as Uruguay.
55. Richard E. Haymaker, From Pampas to Hedgerows and Downs: A Study of W.H. Hudson, p. 95. Haymaker finds The Purple Land comparable to A Sentimental Journey, Dead Souls, and A Bible in Spain; it 'does for the Banda Oriental what [these other books] do for other lands'. (Ibid, p. 95.)
56. Jorge Luis Borges, Borges; a reader, ed. by Emir Rodriguez Monegal and Alastair Reid; Dutton, N.Y., 1981, p. 136. (The essay 'About the Purple Land' - 'Nota sobre "The Purple Land"' - was originally published in La Nación, August 3rd. 1941, and reprinted in Other Inquisitions of 1952.) Borges also comments that 'The Purple Land is perhaps unexcelled by any work of gaucho literature' (ibid, p. 137).
57. PL, p. 254.
58. PL, p. 333. Contrast his earlier sentiments, on pp. 12-13:  
 "I swear that I, too, will become a conspirator if I remain long on this soil. Oh, for a thousand young men of Devon and Somerset here with me, every one of them with a brain on fire with thoughts like mine! What a glorious deed would be done for humanity! What a mighty cheer we would raise for the glory of the old England that is passing away! Blood would flow in yon streets as it never flowed before, or, I should say, as it only flowed in them once, and that was when they were swept clean by British bayonets. And afterwards there would be peace, and the grass would be greener and the flowers brighter for that crimson shower.  
 "Is it not then bitter as wormwood and gall to think that over these domes and towers... no longer than half a century ago, fluttered the holy cross of St. George! For never was there a holier crusade undertaken, never a nobler conquest planned, than that which had for its object the wresting this fair country from unworthy hands, to make it for all time part of the mighty English kingdom."
59. PL, pp. 334-35.
60. PL, p. 336.
61. Other examples would include the kindness and earnestness of Dolores, Santa Coloma's friend; and the goodness of Demetria.
62. PL, p. 51.

63. PL, p. 270.
64. PL, p. 272.
65. It is, admittedly, in relation to Don Hilario that Hudson uses snake imagery in, for once, a purely negative form:

The more I saw of [Don Hilario], the less I liked him; and though I am not prejudiced about snakes... believing as I do that ancient tradition has made us very unjust towards these interesting children of our universal mother [i.e. the earth], I can think of no epithet except snaky to describe this man. Wherever I happened to be about the place he had a way of coming upon me, stealing through the weeds on his belly as it were, then suddenly appearing unawares before me; while something in his manner suggested a subtle, cold-blooded, venomous nature. Those swift glances of his, which perpetually came and went with such bewildering rapidity, reminded me not of the immovable, stony gaze of the serpent's lidless eyes, but of the flickering little forked tongue, that flickers, flickers, vanishes and flickers again, and is never for one moment at rest.

(PL, pp. 280-81.)

66. PL, p. 158.
67. PL, p. 165. This passage also gives an instance of Hudson's characteristic use of bird-imagery.
68. PL, p. 72.
69. PL, p. 191.
70. PL, p. 189.
71. PL, p. 29.
72. PL, p. 2.
73. PL, p. 352.
74. PL, p. 2.
75. PL, p. 11.
76. PL, p. 12.
77. PL, p. 320.
78. PL, pp. 207-08.
79. PL, p. 338.
80. Hudson, A Crystal Age, 2nd. edition; London, 1906, p. v. Hereafter abbreviated as CA.
81. CA, p. vii.

82. LWIII, pp. 174-75. (Letter of June, 1917.)
83. CA, p. 196.
84. Ruth Tomalin, W.H. Hudson: A Biography, p. 133.
85. CA, pp. vii-viii. Cf. the Time Traveller's first impressions of the Eloi in H.G. Wells, The Time Machine.
86. CA, p. 2. Haymaker rightly criticises the plot-mechanics here ('... what an unconscionable period of unconsciousness!'), and also at the end where 'we become aware that the traveller is being forced to record his own death.' (From Pampas to Hedgerows and Downs, p. 325.)
87. CA, pp. 4-5.
88. CA, p. 211.
89. The rainbow-lily is of course a creation of Hudson's imagination. See CA, pp. 201-02, 208-09.
90. CA, p. 257.
91. CA, pp. 181, 182.
92. CA, p. 42.
93. CA, pp. 70-71.
94. CA, p. 77.
95. CA, p. 256-57.
96. In a letter to Garnett (June, 1917), Hudson in fact refers to 'the "House Beautiful" idea' as 'trashy'. (LWIII, p. 176.)
97. CA, pp. 129-30.
98. I'll give just two examples of the sort of flaws to be found in A Crystal Age. Smith enters into a bond for a year in exchange for a suit of the clothes worn by the house-members. The absurdity of this is compounded by attempts to justify Smith's contract - he says,
- Those strange garments had looked so refreshingly picturesque, and I had conceived such an intense longing to wear them!
- (CA, p. 104.) This is so little persuasive that Hudson tries to make up for it - unsuccessfully - by following on with a digression on the subject of clothes, lasting almost two pages. Somewhat later in the narrative, we find the following fragment of dialogue, spoken by Smith (who has found out Yoletta's age to be thirty-one - when he'd assumed it to be fourteen):
- "Oh, Yoletta, what an awful cram! I mean - oh, I beg your pardon for being so rude! But - but don't you think you can draw it mild? Thirty-one - what a joke!"
- (CA, p. 157.) The awkwardness of this outdistances the simple

expression of Smith's awkwardness, and reads as - not humorous - but painfully silly.

99. CA, pp. 130-32.
100. CA, p. 148.
101. CA, p. 78.
102. CA, p. 79.
103. CA, p. 80.
104. CA, pp. 247-48.
105. CA, p. 149.
106. CA, p. 295.
107. CA, pp. 160-61, 167.
108. CA, pp. 227-28.
109. CA, p. 296.
110. CA, p. 250.
111. CA, p. 302.
112. CA, p. 304. The 'beautiful flower of love' might be seen as a contrast to the rainbow-lily, which symbolizes the concerns of the Crystal Age people.
113. CA, pp. 175-76.
114. CA, p. 251.
115. Ruth Tomalin, Introduction to South American Romances, p. xiii; John T. Frederick, William Henry Hudson, p. 48.
116. As to the dates of these pieces, 'The Story of a Piebald Horse', as already noted, was originally part of The Purple Land, published in 1885; 'Niño Diablo' was first published in 1890 in Macmillan's Magazine; I have not discovered any clear indication of when 'Marta Riquelme' or 'El Ombú' were completed, although Ruth Tomalin states that 'El Ombú' - while based on a much earlier notebook - was begun in 1890 (see W.H. Hudson: A Biography, p. 193). The greater maturity of the writing of these two stories - both in the skill which is displayed in the handling of language and of the themes developed, and in the 'deepened' vision involved - suggests some gap in time between these and the shorter pieces in the volume.
117. The book is indeed dedicated to Cunninghame Graham -  
 Who has lived with and knows (even to the marrow as they would themselves say) the horsemen of the Pampas, and who alone of

European writers has rendered something of the vanishing colour of that remote life.

(Hudson, El Ombú; London, 1927, p. 7. Hereafter abbreviated as EO.) Hudson's dedication appropriately fastens upon the knowledge and the rendering of local detail of Cunninghame Graham's work; it is the gravity and imaginative vision of 'El Ombú' and 'Marta Riquelme' - going beyond these qualities - which sets them apart from both 'Niño Diablo' and 'The Story of a Piebald Horse' and from Cunninghame Graham's work.

118. EO, p. 81.
119. EO, p. 111.
120. EO, p. 115.
121. EO, p. 106.
122. Ruth Tomalin, Introduction to South American Romances, p. xiv.
123. EO, p. 13.
124. EO, p. 14.
125. Edward Garnett, 'A Note on Hudson's Romances', Green Mansions; London, 1923 edition, p. vi. The remark recalls Heraclitus' Fragment 103. (In Guy Davenport's paraphrase, this reads: 'Action is character, and character fate....' Geography of the Imagination, p. 264.)
126. EO, p. 16.
127. EO, p. 30.
128. EO, p. 29.
129. EO, p. 37.
130. EO, p. 47.
131. EO, p. 38.
132. With regard to the rôle of purposiveness in Hudson's views, see Part One, Chapter Eight.
133. EO, p. 63.
134. See EO, pp. 45-46.
135. Ezra Pound, Selected Prose 1909-1965, p. 402.
136. EO, p. 15.
137. EO, p. 73.
138. EO, p. 75.



139. EO, p. 78. Nicandro says, regarding Monica:  
 Some have died of pure grief... but the crazed may live many years.  
 We sometimes think it would be better if they were dead; but not  
 in all cases - not, senor, in this.  
 (EO, p. 77.)
140. EO, p. 135.
141. EO, p. 138.
142. EO, p. 136.
143. EO, p. 147.
144. EO, p. 140.
145. EO, pp. 139-40.
146. EO, p. 141.
147. Rosaura, Viera's wife, turns herself into a bird-woman to participate  
 in a witches' sabbath. Viera describes her transformation in the  
 following passage:  
 Suddenly I heard a rushing noise like the sound of great wings  
 above me; then it seemed to me as if beings of some kind had  
 alighted on the roof; the walls shook, and I heard voices calling,  
 "Sister! sister!" Rosaura rose and threw off her night-dress,  
 then, taking ointment from the pot and rubbing it on the palms of  
 her hands, she passed it rapidly over her whole body, arms, and  
 legs, only leaving her face untouched. Instantly she became  
 covered with a plumage of a slaty-blue colour; only on her face  
 were no feathers. At the same time from her shoulders sprang  
 wings which were incessantly agitated. She hurried forth, closing  
 the door after her; once more the walls trembled or seemed to  
 tremble; a sound of rushing wings was heard, and, mingling with  
 it, shrill peals of laughter; then all was still.  
 (Hudson, Tales of the Pampas; N.Y., 1939, pp. 116-17.) Metamorphosis  
 is used here to symbolise the more-than-natural - in its demonic form.
148. EO, p. 143.
149. EO, p. 149.
150. EO, p. 157. Marta's hair had been cut off by her Indian husband.
151. EO, p. 162.
152. EO, pp. 163, 164.
153. EO, pp. 164-65.
154. EO, pp. 165-66.
155. EO, p. 166.
156. Morley Roberts, W.H. Hudson: A Portrait, p. 130.

157. Ruth Tomalin, W.H. Hudson, pp. 119-20.
158. See Chapters Three, Four and Six, passim.
159. Particularly, in the discussions of A Crystal Age and El Ombú.
160. Hudson, Green Mansions; London, 1935, p. 9. Hereafter abbreviated as GM.
161. GM, p. 16.
162. GM, p. 18.
163. GM, p. 21.
164. GM, p. 32. For Abel's attitudes towards the Indians, see below, in the section on 'darkness'.
165. GM, pp. 32-33.
166. GM, p. 52.
167. GM, pp. 60-61.
168. It is interesting in connection with the polarization of the Indian village and the forest that even after the Indians kill Rima, and hence no longer fear the forest, they only enter it for hunting, rather than setting up abode there. They can - in the symbolic economy of the narrative - enter it because it is, anyway, supportive of ambivalent qualities; but they still do not appear as inhabitants of it.
169. I will return to this in the section on 'darkness'.
170. GM, p. 221.
171. GM, p. 311.
172. BN, p. 153.
173. Hudson stresses the universality of snake-worship, and posits a notion of similar structures of thought and experience occurring throughout mankind; see BN, pp. 161-65.
174. Quoted in BN, p. 154. (John Ruskin, The Queen of the Air, pp. 82, 84.)
175. BN, p. 54. (The Queen of the Air, pp. 82-83.)
176. J.E. Cirlot notes that traditionally (i.e. in various mythologies) the snake has had symbolic connotations of the chthonic and the primordial, being associated with the life-force and with energy, and with mysteries, dangers, etc. See A Dictionary of Symbols, pp. 35-37 and pp. 285-87.
177. John Ruskin, The Queen of the Air, p. 84.
178. Again, Cirlot emphasises the traditional 'ambivalence and multi-valencies' of snake symbolism. (Op. cit., p. 285.)

179. Rev. Samuel Lockwood, quoted in BN, p. 156.
180. BN, p. 155.
181. BN, p. 156.
182. GM, pp. 75-76.
183. GM, pp. 76-77.
184. GM, p. 78.
185. GM, p. 299.
186. GM, p. 299.
187. GM, p. 300.
188. GM, p. 299.
189. GM, p. 311.
190. GM, p. 311.
191. GM, p. 312.
192. John Ruskin, The Queen of the Air, p. 84.
193. GM, pp. 135-36.
194. GM, p. 165.
195. GM, p. 40.
196. GM, pp. 37, 38.
197. GM, p. 270. ('The Daughter of the Didi' is the Indians' name for Rima. They suppose her to have been the offspring of a man and a Didi or river-spirit.)
198. Morley Roberts, W.H. Hudson: A Portrait, p. 132.
199. W.J. Keith, The Rural Tradition, p. 188; Ruth Tomalin, W.H. Hudson: A Biography, p. 24. Tomalin adds that Rima is 'perhaps symbolic also of some quality in Hudson, something primitive, innocent and savage...'
200. Frank Swinnerton, The Georgian Literary Scene, 1910-1935; London, n.d., pp. 112-13.
201. Jason Wilson, W.H. Hudson: The Colonial's Revenge; University of London, Institute of Latin American Studies, 1981, p. 10.
202. Ibid, p. 10.
203. Ibid, p. 10.
204. Ibid, p. 11.

205. I think we could better describe his belief as being that poetry is primarily emotional/expressive rather than 'biological'.
206. See Guy Davenport, The Geography of the Imagination, pp. 24-25 and p. 146.
207. J.E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 252.
208. Ibid, p. 259.
209. Guy Davenport, op. cit., p. 26.
210. Ibid, p. 268.
211. Ibid, p. 381.
212. This last aspect will be left until the discussion of 'darkness' in the novel. But I should just add here that there is one suggestion of continuation of life, where Rima returns in a vision and Abel - after saying that 'This, too, was a phantom, a Rima of the mind, one of the shapes the ever-changing black vapours of remorse and insanity would take; and all her mournful sentences were woven out of my own brain' - still finds it possible to say, impressed by the truth of what this phantom Rima says and presumably the truth of the words to the reality of Rima, that 'It was, indeed, Rima returned' to tell him about the sorrow he has caused her. (GM, p. 302.) Obviously, this is too ambiguous to counter the 'negative' qualities of its surrounding passages.
213. Rima's harmony with nature and wild animal-life is taken further in Abel's description of her as combining human intelligence with 'that beautiful physical brightness which the wild animals have', the 'all-seeing, all-hearing alertness... one remarks in a wild creature....' (GM, pp. 83, 82.) This animal-like alertness can be seen as reminiscent of Niño Diablo.
214. GM, p. 218.
215. GM, p. 209.
216. GM, p. 211.
217. GM, p. 176.
218. GM, p. 178.
219. GM, pp. 178-79.
220. GM, pp. 307, 310. At one point, Abel does say that, 'strong as was her faith in the supernatural, she appeared as ready to escape from it, when a way of escape offered...' (GM, p. 199.) However it is clear from the context - centring upon Nuflo's belief that Rima's acts of extra-ordinary perception result from the intervention of her dead mother in heaven - that in this particular instance, the reference is to religious superstition.
221. GM, p. 233.

222. GM, pp. 234, 235.
223. GM, p. 66.
224. GM, pp. 80-81.
225. GM, p. 81.
226. GM, pp. 172, 171. See pp. 95-100 for Abel's remarks on the discontinuity of Rima's behaviour and appearance.
227. GM, pp. 116-17.
228. GM, p. 130.
229. GM, pp. 112-13.
230. GM, p. 119.
231. GM, pp. 120-21.
232. GM, p. 172. Pages 171-72 relate her experience of love and the unsettling effect it has on her.
233. GM, p. 239.
234. GM, p. 242.
235. GM, p. 5.
236. GM, pp. 4-5.
237. GM, p. 17.
238. GM, p. 138.
239. GM, p. 72.
240. GM, pp. 53, 260, 26.
241. As to Hudson's own feelings about 'savages', I think we can fairly describe them as ambivalent. As I remarked in Part One, he is often condescending - even contemptuous - of non-Western cultures. An example can be given from Idle Days in Patagonia (pp. 39, 40) where he remarks of the contemporary Patagonian Indians that 'contact with a superior [i.e. Western] race has debased them and ensured their destruction.' (My italics.) Of their ancestors he says only that - from the remaining evidence of 'their vanished life' - 'it seemed evident that the mind was not wholly dormant in them....' The assumption of superiority here can only be considered naive and irksome. On the 'plus' side, he can remark in A Hind in Richmond Park:
- We ourselves sometimes cherish the delusion, probably imparted to us by anthropological and other masters, that the passion of love, in all its forms of devotion to a loved one, is different both in character and degree in savage and primitive people from the feeling in us. Doubtless it is true in some cases, in some

degraded tribes or races, but it is not a general truth. Savage men are capable of every form of love and self-sacrifice as well as ourselves....

But admittedly he then goes on to say that 'the love of another goes further back to the lower animals....' (HRP, p. 50.)

242. Abel certainly displays arrogance with another character, Nuflo: "Moderate your language, old man," I said; "remember that you are addressing a superior." (GM, p. 167.)
243. GM, p. 258. (Italics are mine.)
244. GM, p. 264.
245. GM, p. 273.
246. GM, p. 274.
247. GM, pp. 276-77.
248. GM, p. 277.
249. GM, p. 279.
250. GM, pp. 279-80.
251. GM, p. 280.
252. GM, pp. 283-84.
253. GM, p. 284.
254. GM, p. 298.
255. GM, p. 287.
256. GM, p. 289.
257. GM, p. 290.
258. GM, p. 291.
259. GM, p. 297.
260. GM, p. 297. The meaning is: Without you and without God and me. Siu, incidentally, is a misprint for sin ('without'); mi should be spelt with an accent. (This information was obtained from correspondence with William Rowe of the Spanish Department, Kings College, London University, and Mathias Goeritz, formerly of the Department of Visual Education, Universidad Iberoamericana (Mexico).)
261. GM, pp. 300-01.
262. GM, p. 302.
263. GM, p. 302.

264. GM, pp. 302-03.
265. GM, pp. 314, 315.
266. GM, p. 312.
267. GM, p. 304.
268. As I have already indicated, the long journey he finally makes from the forest near Ytaioa to Georgetown is at least as dreadful as his experiences in the forest. He calls one place he has been through 'an earthly inferno' (GM, p. 309). At times, he feels he has already died, and only his will remains to drive the dead flesh on. He is pursued by ghostly Indians and by 'that superhuman man-eating monster' of Indian mythology, the Curupita (GM, p. 310). Significantly, Abel characterises certain experiences in terms of 'the workings of remorse in a disordered mind' (GM, p. 309).
269. GM, p. 102.
270. GM, p. 275.
271. GM, pp. 275, 276.
272. GM, p. 279.
273. GM, p. 275.
274. GM, p. 307.
275. Hudson wrote that 'An Old Thorn' 'is fairly good - May Sinclair said it was the best thing I've ever written'. (MBB, p. 265. Letter of June 20th.)
276. John T. Frederick, William Henry Hudson, p. 60. MBB, p. 265. (Letter of June 20th.)
277. LWHH, p. 196. (Letter of February 1920.)
278. LWHH, p. 202. (Letter of May 1920.)
279. LWHH, pp. 203-04. (Letter of May 1920.)
280. Hudson, Dead Man's Plack, An Old Thorn, & Poems; London, 1924, pp. 9-10. (Dead Man's Plack and An Old Thorn appeared originally without Hudson's poetry in 1920.) Hereafter abbreviated as DMP.
281. DMP, p. 133.
282. DMP, p. 135.
283. LWHH, pp. 200-01. (Letter of March 1920.)
284. On the meaning of the word 'plack', and the location of the stone cross, see LWHH, pp. 205-06. (Letter of June 1920.)
285. DMP, pp. 41-42.

286. DMP, p. 42.
287. DMP, p. 53.
288. DMP, p. 58.
289. DMP, p. 62.
290. DMP, p. 69.
291. DMP, p. 72.
292. DMP, p. 75.
293. DMP, p. 26.
294. DMP, pp. 88, 87.
295. DMP, p. 98.
296. DMP, p. 99.
297. J.E. Cirlot, A Dictionary of Symbols, p. 347.
298. DMP, p. 106. (I will comment on the snake-symbolism involved in the image of the ivy below.)
299. DMP, p. 108.
300. DMP, p. 111.
301. Hudson defines animism in Far Away and Long Ago (p. 194) as the 'sense of the supernatural in natural things', and affirms his own possession of it. In an earlier book, Idle Days in Patagonia, he could provide a disappointingly reductionistic definition of it, in psychological terms, as 'the mind's projection of itself into nature, its attribution of its own sentient life and intelligence to all things' (p. 116); but even in Far Away he could - with that inconsistency I have remarked upon in Part One - refer to animism as 'the sense and apprehension of an intelligence like our own and more powerful in all visible things' and speak of it as 'the projection of ourselves into nature', thus 'animating' natural things (p. 194).
302. DMP, pp. 119-20.
303. DMP, p. 126.
304. In this passage, and in the Postscript to the story, Hudson rails at the cruelty and injustice of such sentences and of the men who inflicted them. Compare Chapter XVIII of A Shepherd's Life, where Hudson writes with anger at the injustice of the sentences passed out by British courts in the early 1800s, when a person could be sentenced to death for stealing half-a-crown. Hudson comments on the judges involved:
- There are good and bad among all, and in all professions, but there is also a black spot in most, possibly in all hearts, which



may be developed to almost any extent, and change the justest, wisest, most moral men into 'human devils' - the phrase invented by Canon Wilberforce in another connection. In reading the old reports and the expressions used by the judges in their summings-up and sentences, it is impossible not to believe that the awful power they possessed, and its constant exercise, had not only produced the inevitable hardening effect, but had made them cruel in the true sense of the word.

(A Shepherd's Life, p. 167.)

205. DMP, pp. 129-30.

CONCLUSION

I want to end this study of W.H. Hudson's fiction and non-fiction with a brief restatement of my central thesis.

I argued, in the Introduction, that Hudson's writing gives the impression of artlessness through a great concentration on the simplest, and at the same time most lively and telling, way of conveying the details of a scene or situation, thing or event.<sup>1</sup> The attention to these details is, as I have maintained in my discussion in Part One (Chapter Two), a question of openness. At the same time, there is a careful attention to details of language involved in the choice of words. The effect of this attention is precisely registered by Richard Haymaker, when he describes how Hudson's simplicity,

absorbing many details in its broad, serene flow and dissolving the mere accidents of personality, allows the objects being described, even the most elusive ones, to shine through. 2

To take an example from Idle Days in Patagonia:

Far out in the middle of the swift blue current floated flocks of black-necked swans, their white plumage shining like foam in the sunlight; while just beneath us, scarcely a stone's throw off, stood the thatched farmhouse of our conductor, the smoke curling up peacefully from the kitchen chimney. A grove of large old cherry trees, in which the house was embowered, added to the charm of the picture; and as we rode down to the gate we noticed the fully ripe cherries glowing like live coals amid the deep green foliage. 3

Hudson's evocation of a serene or peaceful scene in order to set off the shock of the cherries that glow like live coals - an image that reveals the aliveness of nature - is effected with an economy and simplicity of language.

R.H. Charles has written of Hudson that he 'not only describes but he reveals'; and that Hudson's art is self-effacingly concerned with revelation or disclosure.<sup>4</sup> Guy Davenport draws attention to something similar in Gerard Manley Hopkins when he says that 'It is Hopkins' delineation of

beauty that leads most of us to him in the first place', and goes on to maintain that:

He wrote when words still had to serve science in its descriptions of nature. The photograph and half-tone cut had not yet arrived to assist geologists like Hugh Miller and Agassiz. A generation of exact prose invented the discipline with which Hopkins described the textures and shapes of things. 5

Hopkins's writing, unlike Hudson's, does not efface itself in the disclosure it effects - but in both writers, an exact language is used to make manifest beauty or some other modality of being.

It is in making manifest the more unfamiliar modalities of being - whether beauty heightened to a preternatural level, or some other epiphanic quality or dimension - that writing enters into the domain of the symbolic; i.e. it discloses what cannot be stated in straightforwardly 'objective' - or logical - terms. The dominant symbolic idea in Hudson is the earthly Paradise - a projection of paradisaical perfection, harmony and wholeness through the details of the natural order. In Far Away and Long Ago, for example, he projects the world of his boyhood as 'an enchanted realm, a nature at once natural and supernatural', and remarks of his awe before nature that:

it was the mystical faculty in me which produced those strange rushes or bursts of feeling and lifted me out of myself at moments.... 6

Indeed, his description of peach trees in Far Away brings to mind a Samuel Palmer painting in its suggestion of preternatural beauty:

Even now when I recall the sight of those old flowering peach trees, with trunks as thick as a man's body, and the huge mounds or clouds of myriads of roseate blossoms seen against the blue ethereal sky, I am not sure that I have seen anything in my life more perfectly beautiful. 7

In a particularly instructive passage in Idle Days in Patagonia, Hudson writes of those moments when nature appears in a supernatural light:

The day of supernatural splendor and glory comes only after many days that are only natural, and of a neutral colour. It is watched and waited for, and when it comes is like a day of some great festival and

rejoicing - the day when peace was made, when our love was returned, when a child was born to us. Such sights are like certain sounds, that not only delight us with their pure and beautiful quality, but wake in us feelings that we cannot fathom or analyze. They are familiar, yet stranger than the strangest things, with a beauty that is not of the earth, as if a loved friend, long dead, had unexpectedly looked back to us from heaven, transfigured. 8

It is these epiphanic moments that give some glimpse of Paradise, apprehended through the details of personal life as surely as the details of nature; and the disclosure endures as something elusive.

Hudson's projection of the paradisial in human as well as natural life is most persuasively felt in Green Mansions; and it is in Rima's fate at the hands of the Indians that Hudson gives one of his most powerful portrayals of the elusive and threatened nature of the paradisial on earth. The death of Rima recalls Guy Davenport's words regarding the dead Persephone. Davenport tries to fathom the significance of this image for the present age, and asks if it means:

That the spirit is dying in our time? That we live in a spiritual hell rather than a natural order? 9

The elusiveness of the paradisial in the face of contingency and evil which Hudson presents especially in Green Mansions, 'El Ombú' and 'Marta Riquelme', would seem more pervasive than Davenport's questions suggest; but he is entirely to the point, if we understand 'a spiritual hell' in the sense of alienation from the natural order and from the paradisial realm disclosed through the natural. This alienation can be seen in those doctrines which reduce the natural order to mechanistic data, set over against the human subject in 'objective' fashion. But it can also be seen in the contrast Hudson makes between the typical 'civilized' person who has grown apart from nature and those who still maintain a condition of oneness with nature. In his writings, it is Rima who maintains that oneness in a way that contains the greatest symbolic resonance.<sup>10</sup>

One of the main aspects of Hudson's work is that he gives definition to

the paradisial as something elusive in experiential terms. It is also significant that he bears witness to the experience of the spiritual or epiphanic against the grain of all that threatens or seeks to deny it, either in the realm of ideology or in the realm of contrary experience. The achievement of Green Mansions goes even further, for in that work he gives strongly realized mythopoeic expression to this complex theme. The full significance of such an achievement can only be gauged in relation to the recognition of his fictional works as works of the symbolic imagination, rather than as fantasies written as a side-line by a field naturalist. The present work is intended to go some way at least towards disclosing this significance.

NOTES

1. See the Introduction, Section 1, pp. 5-6. W.J. Keith, The Nature Tradition (p. 186), is also relevant here.
2. Richard E. Haymaker, From Pampas to Hedgerows and Downs, p. 155.
3. Hudson, Idle Days in Patagonia, pp. 16-17.
4. R.H. Charles, 'The Writings of W.H. Hudson', Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association, Vol. XX, Oxford, 1935, p. 144.
5. Guy Davenport, The Geography of the Imagination, p. 284.
6. FALA, pp. 254, 282.
7. FALA, p. 48.
8. Hudson, Idle Days in Patagonia, pp. 51-52.
9. Guy Davenport, The Geography of the Imagination, p. 84.
10. For an example of Hudson's comments on 'civilized' man, see Idle Days in Patagonia, p. 75.

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