

Green Mansions Book

by

William Henry Hudson

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This is a study in which I seek to uncover the underlying organisation of W. H. Hudson's novel *Green Mansions* by calling attention to the importance of immanence in the text. In establishing my thesis that immanence is central to the novel, I use the method of phenomenology worked out by the early twentieth century philosopher Edmund Husserl as well as the philosophy of immanence that is central to the phenomenological writings of the late twentieth century phenomenologist Michel Henry. Husserl's method involves bracketing (sidelining) phenomena that are not directly and immanently given in the field of investigation (which for me is the literary text). Accordingly, I sideline into footnotes issues that are speculative or that have to do with factors that are not directly evident in the primary text. Henry's philosophy of immanence (as well as Husserl's phenomenology) involves paying attention to the way in which some forms of manifestation are more immediate ('immanent') than others. In this study, I aim to show that *Green Mansions* shapes itself as an imaginative world that does not make sense if the reader does not become aware of the way in which the heroine (Rima) stands for immediacy ('immanence') in opposition to social, linguistic, and visual systems hostile to immediacy of expression, immediacy of behaviour, immediacy of movement, and immediacy of thought. I demonstrate that, once in love with Rima, the protagonist (Abel) is caught in a contradiction between the immediate (immanence) and the non-immediate (transcendence), being thus condemned to a wavering state of ambiguity and irresolute fascination. On the level of language and visuality, I investigate the general contradiction between immediacy and non-immediacy in terms of a distinction between presentation (which is immediate) and representation (which is not).¹ A

¹ My use of the presentation-versus-representation model conforms to the distinction that Edmund Husserl makes between *Gegenwärtigung* and *Vergegenwärtigung*. In translations of these words published in philosophy, *Vergegenwärtigung* commonly occurs either as "re-presentation" or as the

vision of Rima is not an image of her, for an image (a representation) has already translated her into picture-thinking, thus imposing a mode of objectification. I seek to show that Abel tends to work vision into image, Rima's very mode of presenting (rather than representing) herself working in the opposite direction as a resistance to Abel's way of viewing reality, feeling, and experience.

Abel is a Venezuelan adventurer who travels to remote parts of south-western Venezuela, to the deepest recesses of the Amazonian rainforest, where people have not yet been assimilated into the ways of European civilisation. His story could be read from a postcolonial point of view, forwarding racist opinions within the framework of a typically imperialist, Eurocentric agenda. Another possible approach would be a feminist outlook, highlighting an antiquated view of men as superior to women. However, I wish to bracket these issues in order to focus on dimensions of the text that are not reducible to issues of culture, gender, or race. My own aim is to use a phenomenological method designed to highlight phenomena that are immanent to the primary text, requiring no explanatory support other than the text itself. While I am aware of frameworks of ideas used to put *Green Mansions* in the context of literary-historical forces that would hypothetically explain various phenomena in it,² I here refrain such attempts, since my selected phenomenological approach is intrinsic rather than extrinsic, focusing more or less exclusively on that which is internal to the text. In using a method of bracketing (Husserl's *epoché*) to parenthesise that which is transcendent to the text, I am not implying that one needs to be blind to context and history. It is a matter of emphasis. I seek evidence for my thesis (the idea of the centrality of immanence) in phenomena that are manifestly interior to the text rather

neologism "presentification" (Husserl 110). Since philosophical neologisms might be an obstacle rather than a help for the reader, I choose to use the word "representation" for *Vergegenwärtigung*. The word "representation" has many meanings. The meaning I give to it in this study is somewhat narrower than the common one used in English studies. Here the emphasis is on the "re-" of "re-presentation," i.e., on the fact that *Vergegenwärtigung* is a second-order *Gegenwärtigung*, as when the act of recollecting an act of perception is not the original act of perception (591–92). The original act is in my terminological use the "presentation." Any act that modifies it by introducing a different act-level is a "representation."

² Various critics point out similarities between *Green Mansions* and other literary works. Carlos Baker sees Lady Morgan's novel *The Missionary* as the source-book of *Green Mansions*, stating that "Hudson has followed the general structural plan of *The Missionary*" (253), whereas Hoxie N. Fairchild focuses on Arthur O'Shaughnessy's narrative poem *Colibri* as essential to Hudson's story. Kay W. Hitchcock points out various myths as important to "Rima's mysterious power to charm birds and snakes" as well as her ability to "glide secretly through the forest" (48). Richard F. Hardin has reviewed *Green Mansions* in the light of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, submitting the idea that Miranda and Ariel are fused into Rima, who has "Ariel's bird-like qualities and his Pan-like power over nature, as well as Miranda's innocence and beauty" (93).

than transcendent to it. The methodological bracketing is not to be seen as a way of narrowing inquiry but as a procedure of letting-be. The primary text is in an accentuated way given the freedom to speak for itself through itself. Such a phenomenological viewpoint implies in Husserlian fashion that almost all attention is directed to that which is immediately given. It is my thesis that what is immediately given in *Green Mansions* is above all the feeling and reality of immanence.

In following the lines of conceptualisation introduced by Michel Henry, I highlight degrees of closeness in experience. There are primary, first-order forms of closeness that are *passively* constituted and second-order, weaker, and sometimes inauthentic forms of closeness that tend to be *actively* constituted. Primary forms of manifestation express an immediacy that remains purely immanent if it does not get marked by transcendence and representation. On the second-order level, there are plenty of go-betweens and mediations. This is a stratum ruled by representations, images, signs, and otherness.

In his philosophy of immanence, Michel Henry speaks of the first-order stratum of life as being on the hither side of the world.³ The word ‘world’ here means a second-order stratum dominated by representations, images, signs, and the discursive understanding in general. Humans have a discursive (indirect) way of seeing reality and a non-discursive way of experiencing everything directly. Immanence is systematically shut out from experience by our more or less discursive systems of representations. In literature of a lyrical kind, language is no longer a mainly discursive milieu, since it works primarily through atmosphere and feeling. Affective and atmospheric realities are not representations, and even when they are transmitted in words and sentences they go on having a primarily immanent, pre-representational momentum.

In a novel there is an interweaving of levels, some phenomena actualising with the force and meaning of presentation, other phenomena manifesting themselves with the (weaker) force and meaning of representation. The difference may be felt in

³ Always hidden from the world, feeling is for Michel Henry the most intense form of life-manifestation. Its invisible “density” actualises itself “in the absence of any relationship” (*The Essence of Manifestation* 472). The immanence of feeling or the feeling of immanence is experience central to life. Here there are no representations but only the invisible presentation of an “interior richness” that keeps “arising of itself” in a movement “of feeling toward its own content” (473). In my view *Green Mansions* presents the inability of immanence to become world-visible by showing how Rima disintegrates when pulled out of the forest-life where she appears in flashes of manifestation but never in the light of the world and its systems of representation.

terms of the sense of the presence or absence of a gap. *Representations* are accompanied by the sense of an interval between one thing and another (i.e., between thing and sign, thing and image) whereas *presentations* lack such a split. In *presentations*, what is real enters consciousness as point-blank immanence without distance. In contrast, *representations* are usually already a bit intellectualised. They contain an element of detachment, reflection, or objectification. *Presentations* are immanently pre-reflective. *Representations* are already-reflective. The feel of the difference between representation and presentation often materialises as the presence or absence of the possibility of *holding-in-front-of*. No such holding is normally possible in immanence (presentation), but only in transcendence (representation).

Michel Henry accentuates the priority that life, art, and religion give to immanence over transcendence (of presentations over representations) by highlighting the ideas and paintings of Wassily Kandinsky, an artist who himself created theories of immanence. In the immanent sphere of sheer *presentations*, “there is no putting at a distance and no putting into a world—there is nothing external, because there is no exteriority in it” (*Seeing the Invisible* 7). In situations or acts where there is no holding-at-a-distance, there is no interval. Nor is there any interval-closing instrument or gap-closing bridge. In the domain of presentations, nothing is ‘between.’ There is no medium or relation. There is instead an immediacy in which all kinds of go-between or interval are absent, replaced by a completeness lacking anything divisive. Consider the hostile nature of the idea of instrument in the poem by Wendell Berry below:

The yellow-throated warbler, the highest remotest voice
of this place, sings in the tops of the tallest sycamores,
but one day he came twice to the railing of my porch
where I sat at work above the river. *He was too close
to see with binoculars. Only the naked eye could take him in,
a bird more beautiful than every picture of himself,
more beautiful than himself killed and preserved
by the most skilled taxidermist, more beautiful
than any human mind, so small and inexact,
could hope ever to remember. My mind became
beautiful by the sight of him. He had the beauty only
of himself alive in the only moment of his life.
He had upon him like a light the whole
beauty of the living world that never dies.* (127, emphasis added)

Connectivity is useless here. No tool or bridge is required. In fact a go-between would spoil the whole moment and destroy the phenomenon. There is no need of any

connectivity for the bird to materialise. It is a pure *presentation*. If the viewer reached for a camera or gun, the bird would be a *representation*. Each vivid phenomenon may be a presentation before it gets translated into the domain of representations. For “the naked eye,” there is nothing in-between, nothing that connects the eye with the bird. It is this type of immediacy that I shall analyse in *Green Mansions*. As we shall see, such immanence is there likewise actualised in the *idea of the bird (and the bird-girl) as a pure presentation*.

*

Abel’s story starts with a secret chamber and an urn containing ashes. These are unknown to the protagonist’s friends and proof of a secret previously unheard of. At this point in the narration (the prologue) the main character is dead and his story is told (in first-person) through a friend of his. It is an account of an escape from Caracas after a failed revolt against the government. In accordance with his boyhood dreams, Abel heads towards the Orinoco River. Since childhood, he has been interested in that part of South America as a place on the hither side of the world, “unadulterated” by modern civilisation (*Green Mansions* 21). He determines to make his way to the inner parts of Guayana, south of the Orinoco in Venezuela, and the Amazonian region near the borders of Colombia and Brazil. Around the Orinoco he makes expeditions to Christian settlements as well as to Indian villages. He keeps a journal of his adventures in the belief that this will promote his fame once he has returned to the capital city. However, after a period of incessant rain he suffers a setback, his papers decomposing in the excessive humidity (23). He realises he will never publish his journal and since he is ill, a friend of his suggests he go to the mountains where the air is drier. He travels with some Indians on their way to the Queneveta mountains, and after a painful journey, he reaches the mountains where he soon enjoys “complete recovery” from his illness (25). However, during his convalescence, he starts to feel restless and when he hears about the Parahuari mountains, where gold is said to be abundant, he is eager to go there. In Parahuari, he looks for gold everywhere, but finds nothing. When he comes to the last village, he has given up hope. For many weeks he has looked for the precious metal but now he no longer dreams of it, i.e., he has let go of a lineal, goal-directed, hyperactive mode

of existence in favour of a letting-go that is more open to contingency, surprise, and randomness.

One evening, after a rainy and depressing day, Abel goes to a stream where he washes his sore feet. Here, part of the sky is “blue again with that tender lucid blue seen after rain” and the “rare loveliness of the scene” brightens his heart. He finds the hills of Parahuari have a “strange glory against the grey rainy clouds” and a “new mystic beauty” that almost makes him forget his fatigue and disillusionment (29). He stays by the stream until the sun sets, watching the heavens transform and observing “a thin, brilliant veil showing through it the distant sky beyond, blue and ethereal” (30). This is the place where birds and their songs enter Abel’s existence, which will be profoundly changed by avian life:

Flocks of birds, a kind of troupiel, were flying past me overhead, flock succeeding flock, on their way to their roosting-place, uttering as they flew a clear bell-like chirp; and there was something ethereal too in those drops of melodious sound, which fell into my heart like raindrops falling into a pool to mix their fresh heavenly water with the water of earth. (30)

Birds have an immanent airy quality that resists all borders and boundaries. They move freely, refusing to obey the law of gravity, and are able to fly low down as well as high up, long distances as well as short, thus having the possibility of moving quickly from one part of space to another and, as it were, be everywhere in the air. When birds fly, their wings move in a billowing way, thus forming a contrast to everything that is straight, firm, and solid. However, immanent in birds is also the capability of moving on the ground. In other words, there is an intertwining of being-in-air qualities and being-on-ground qualities. When the birds pass above Abel, they fly in flocks, thus utilising their immanent possibility of omnipresence—birds in flocks are ubiquitous in the air. This is emphasised by the “succeeding” flocks, i.e., flocks that continue one after another, filling the space with immanent bird-presence. However, not only the birds’ movements are present. More importantly, there is also sound that materialises and forms melodious drops. These drops, containing “something ethereal,” hold a lightness that resembles the weightlessness of a flying bird. Like the birds, the songs are ubiquitous in space. Moreover, they sink into Abel, infusing him and making the sound an immanent part of him.⁴

⁴ As in the case of *Green Mansions*, Hudson’s ornithological writing highlights birds as creatures of immanence. When singing, nightingales “ask for no witness of their song, nor thirst for human praise” (*Birds in Town and Village* 17). From the human viewpoint, the song of a bird is self-sufficient in the

When Abel is suffused with drops of bird songs, he enters a state of being-washed and being-purified. His previous yearning for gold has faded away and instead serenity settles upon him:

Doubtless into the turbid tarn of my heart some sacred drops had fallen—from the passing birds, from that crimson disk 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. This unexpected peace which I had found now seemed to me of infinitely greater value than that yellow metal I had missed finding, with all its possibilities. My wish now was to rest for a season at this spot, so remote and lovely and peaceful, where I had experienced such unusual feelings and such a blessed disillusionment. (30)

The “turbid tarn” is characterised by an opacity that denies transparency and clearness. However, the muddy heart is pervaded by a holiness originating in the birds, the sun, the sky, and the mountains. In the “passing birds,” there is an immanent fleetingness, an impermanence of life, but in the “infinite heaven,” on the other hand, there is an endlessness stretching out in space. Thus, the drops of bird song bring with them winged life with all its qualities as well as life of everything that is in sight, forming a blend of human, bird, sun, heaven, and mountain—all permeating Abel. The infusion of these qualities in his heart involves a state of being-purified and an understanding of earth as virgin and mystic. Furthermore, there is a quality of being-washed and thus renewed. The washing is done by “the heavenly rain” containing the vastness of the sky as well as the purifying and floating quality of the drop. All these qualities pervading Abel bring about a newness, an “unexpected peace,” that makes him reassess his values: gold is no longer of importance to him and, indeed, he now considers his failure to find gold a “blessed disillusionment,” since the states of being-washed and being-purified are of much more worth to him than worldly wealth.⁵

There is one part of the forest around the Indian village that particularly attracts Abel. Here, vegetation and animal life are abundant and he is fascinated by

sense that it is indifferent to ‘the world’ seen as a configuration of social networks centred on the communicative importance of the human ear.

⁵ In *Birds in Town and Village*, Hudson speaks personally about the regenerative power of birds in the constitution of a profound experience of a newness of life. “I could not longer keep away from the birds, which I, too, loved; for now all at once it seemed to me that life was not life without them; that I was grown sick, and all my senses dim; that only the wished sight of wild birds could medicine my vision; that only by drenching it in their wild melody could my tired brain recover its lost vigour” (13).

the monkeys living in the trees “far above earth in a half-way heaven” (41). The immanent airy quality is thus also present in the monkeys: they move effortlessly between trees, using both air and an extension of the ground (the vegetation) for their movements. Thus, in the monkeys there is, similar to the birds, a twining of being-in-air qualities and being-on-ground qualities. There is also a richness of bird-life in the wood, and the birds’ sound has an omnipresent quality in the merge of wind and song. Moreover, they are present everywhere in the wood “swarming through the trees, some running on the trunks and larger branches, others flitting through the foliage, and many keeping on the wing, now hovering and now darting this way or that” (43). Again, the birds are ubiquitous, filling the wood with their presence. Abel makes an attempt to keep the birds in sight, backsliding into his old goal-directed, ego-steered mode of lineal existence. However, the flock moves on in its immanent fleetingness. After his futile efforts he rests, sitting on a root, re-entering a state of passive constitution. At this moment he hears “a low strain of exquisite bird-melody, wonderfully pure and expressive, unlike any musical sound” he has previously heard (43). He thinks of a particular bird, the rialejo, but realises that the melody he hears is totally different:

this song, or musical phrase, was utterly unlike it in character. It was pure, more expressive, softer—so low that at a distance of forty yards I could hardly have heard it. But its greatest charm was its resemblance to the human voice—a voice purified and brightened to something almost angelic. (44)

For a while, the sound ceases and is impossible to hear in spite of his efforts. However, when he gives up his exertion and once again enters a state of passive constitution, the melody is there. It is the “same voice, but not the same song—not the same phrase.” The notes in the melody are altered, now produced with more variety and clarity, giving the impression that the bird is agitated. The song is soon heard again: “a soft warbling, lower than at first, infinitely sweet and tender, sinking to lisping sounds that soon ceased to be audible” (44). When Abel exits the wood, the melody is repeated over and over:

Again and again as I stood there listening it sounded, now so faint and apparently far off as to be scarcely audible; then all at once it would ring out bright and clear within a few yards of me, as if the shy little thing had suddenly grown bold; but, far or near, the vocalist remained invisible, and at length the tantalizing melody ceased altogether. (45)

The sound seems to be everywhere in the wood, moving freely in space. This agile randomness of the strange woodland “ventriloquism” (45) signals a relinquishing of the lineal mode of advance that Abel is used to, his progress through the vegetation now becoming a more rounded, spherical phenomenon, as if he had been forced to abandon lineal narrowness of directedness, becoming more passively receptive and open to the random wealth of life’s multifarious richness.⁶

Abel keeps returning to the wood, where the fascinating melody continues to elude him.⁷ The bird seems to be always around him, yet he never manages to catch a glimpse of it, in spite of its shifting immanent presence all around him. This intrigues him even more strongly and in order to learn more about the sound and the bird producing it, he manages to make his Indian friend Kua-Kó accompany him to the wood. However, this time the sound is not there and the Indian tells Abel about an evil being, capable of killing people, that lives in the forest. Finally, he runs out of the wood, terrified. Abel stays and before long, he hears the voice again, now different in character and lacking the “low, whisper-like talking” which makes him think of it as “the spirit of the wind” breathing “low sighs in syllables and speech.” The angry sound, now “far more rapid, with fewer silent intervals” (50),⁸ is present all around him, but changes in character once again when regaining the “melting” quality it has previously possessed (51). The voice sounds alternately from a far distance and close by, leading him further into the wood. However, at this point there is not only the voice. Abel feels the presence of a being that moves swiftly over the ground and he distinguishes a sound of weightless footsteps. A couple of times he catches a fleeting glimpse of something grey and indistinct that moves “at no great distance” in the

⁶ As J. R. Hamilton points out, there is a similarity between Hudson the naturalist and Hudson the writer. In the former capacity, he “approached nature intuitively and directly rather than rationally and discursively,” thus being “akin to the artist in that both sublimate the brute givenness of materiality: the direct impact of sound, colour, shape, all the multiplicity of the tangible world, is transformed and made significant” (2–3). Hudson would seem to embrace *hylozoism*, the belief that all material things possess life. Hamilton notes that A. N. Whitehead’s definition of immanence fits such an outlook (3).

⁷ We find a similar magnetism in Hudson’s reference to his personal experience of the song of the tree-pipit, which infects “the mind with a soft, delicious languor, a wish to lie perfectly still and drink of the same sweetness again and again in larger measure” (*Birds in Town and Village* 31). The intensity of pursuit is correlative to the elusiveness of the bird, the call of a wryneck setting up a tantalizing string of expectations and disappointments: “I heard his unmistakable cry, now on this hand, now on that. Day after day I followed the voice, sometimes in my eagerness forcing my way through a brambly hedge to emerge with scratched hands and clothes torn, like one that had been set upon and mauled by some savage animal of the cat kind; and still the quaint figure eluded my vision” (35).

⁸ Hudson notes that “the harsh grating or piercing sounds that properly express violent emotions” in many singing birds “have been nearly or quite lost,” replaced by “sounds that are mere lispings” (*Birds in Town and Village* 17–18). In Rima, however, the original immanent sounds have not been lost.

darker shades (52). He is led to a group of monkeys, howling as in a concert and intriguing him to find out more about the mysterious voice.

There is a power that draws Abel to the forest. Moreover, he is in communion with it and all its immanent content, with all “the precious woods and fruits and fragrant gums that would never be trafficked away.” This feeling is “like pain in its intensity,” making him appreciate the state of solitude that is part of his being in the wood. Indeed, he thanks his God for “the gift of . . . those green mansions” (63). In other words, this place on the hither side of the world materialises for Abel as a pure gift, as something that is not the active outcome of a quest but the passive datum of a blessing. This time, however, he does not hear the warbling voice. Instead, at one point, there is a sound resembling human laughter. Although he searches for it, he cannot find the being producing it. However, when he, the following day, hears “a low, warbling note” (67), he cautiously moves in the direction of the sound. What he finds is a human being, a girl.

The young woman, “reclining on the moss among the ferns and herbage” (67), wears one single piece of clothing with a colour somewhere between white and grey, also containing a pale and silky gleam. The colours of her hair and her skin are not possible to determine and moreover there is a “mistiness” in her that makes her seem indistinct. Beams of sunlight fall on her giving her hair “a strange lustre and play of iridescent colour.” When she rises, her movements are smooth, “like the motion of a cloud of mist which changes its form and place.” Thus, in her appearance, different colours merge and mix, joining in a multitude of nuances. Moreover, her movements form a continuum where one position cannot be distinguished from the other. Then she vanishes as if she has “melted away into the verdure” (68). Here, she is swallowed by the forest, the forest and her becoming one single entity, thus denying all gaps, divisions, and borders. Abel is now certain that he has found the origin of the melodious sound: “in this wild solitary girl I had at length discovered the mysterious warbler that so often followed me in the wood.”⁹ Later, Abel returns to the forest. He hopes to see the girl again, but does not succeed. However, as he gives up his hopes of finding her, the sound is there again “very near” (69). Again, the melody comes close

⁹ The earth creature Rima has features similar to a girl Hudson once heard singing. He used to see her on a green, “lying in the sun, . . . as happy as some heat-loving wild animal” (*Birds in Town and Village* 81). Her song is “fresh” and “pure,” seemingly devoid of “earthly trouble.” Resembling “the melody of the birds,” such a girl-song is augmented in richness by the circumstance that it also contains “all that tenderness and depth which is not theirs, but is human only and of the soul” (82).

when human agency and effort are abandoned in favour of passive constitution. I submit that, as in so many other places, the text here makes a point of accentuating absolute proximity as a way of promoting the idea and feeling that immanence is more enriching than transcendence. It is when Abel abandons transcendence (quest, goal-directedness, conquest of horizons) that he is offered glimpses of the secret inner richness of life (sonorously adumbrated by the teasing bird-voice), and conversely it is when he glimpses immanence that he faintly begins to discern the seductive falsity and inhering futility of the metaphysics of transcendence (programmatic commitment to an agenda of excess, surpassing, and border-crossing).

When he finally sees the bird-girl, she forcefully stops him from killing a snake. Her beauty is present, but Abel (now commenting retrospectively from a later, more reflectively mature standpoint) warns us against seeing her as a verbal painting, a “description,” or a “mental vision,” in other words, as a representation. Instead, we are urged to think of the “feeling” in the “original” (79), i.e., of her immanent qualities as presentations of life itself. As the shifting sunlight plays into the quicksilver iridescence of the lustre of her eyes, of the sheen of her skin, of the gloss of her hair, of the melodious notes of her warbling speech, and of the flashes of her swift movements, there is no longer any discernible line of demarcation between the immanent auto-constitution of the bird-girl, the immanent auto-constitution of feeling, and the immanent auto-constitution of life itself as variegated manifestation. In the girl’s presence, Abel ceases to long for transcendence, since the whole spectrum of life’s affective and perceptual possibilities seems to be immanently embodied in a living presence that is immanently embodied as a reality immediately at hand.

In the sunshine Rima is “semi-pellucid” and “luminous, as we see in our fingers when held before a strong firelight” but in the shade she seems to be white with a dim nuance. However, it is “only when looked closely at” that a particular “tender red, a shade sometimes seen in flowers” can be seen in her eyes (80). In other words, some of her immanent qualities are there only in an immanent closeness taken to an extreme. There is, as it were, a deeper immanence within immanence. The text keeps showing us that this immanence-within-immanence is on the one hand something perceivable (accessible by intensified observation) and on the other hand something invisible (given as sheer feeling only). Throughout *Green Mansions*, Abel is intrigued and frustrated by the fact that he cannot appropriate or even access that

second, invisible factor that is so manifest but so invisible in immanence-within-immanence.

The bird-girl's hair varies in colour. Viewed from a short distance, being in shade, it has "a vague, misty appearance," as the sunshine makes it vary from black to white (81). In other words, colours and light merge, forming a kaleidoscopic mixture of all the nuances of the spectrum in a single organism. Abel later notices that there is in her garment "no seam nor hem." Instead, all is "in one piece" (109). I would suggest that this accentuation of seamlessness is forwarded by the text as a way of suggesting that all the various expressions of manifestation in the universe (emblematised by the girl's ever-shifting appearance) have a single source-point. The confusing and almost shocking profusion and plurality of all manifestations (a noticeable feature of tropical sites) are held together by manifestation itself. Manifestations are multiple. Manifestation is single. I submit that the bird-girl calls attention to this multiple-and-single pattern by presenting it to the reader and to Abel as that which she immanently embodies. As Abel notices, Rima is an embodiment (a creature) but also a truth. The girl's constant preoccupation with truth in her conversations underscores this phenomenon. This truth-factor in the girl comes to expression in the intelligent look, which seems to correspond to and be "one with" a bird-like attentiveness he sees in her face. Accordingly, Abel's sense of affective immanence in the presence of the girl is not only erotic: "through that unfamiliar lustre of the wild life shone the spiritualizing light of mind that made us kin" (81). To her is "given this quickness of mind and power to divine distant things" (178).

After a fall that leaves him unconscious, Abel is tended by Nuflo, an old man who has taken care of Rima¹⁰ since the time of her mother's death. However, in the house, Abel does not immediately recognise the bird-girl. No longer discerned in her natural habitat as a being hovering between the small immanence of body-closeness and the vaster immanence of bird-ventriloquism, Rima is now statically viewable at

¹⁰ The name Rima has caused critics to speculate. According to Richard F. Hardin, Rima is a rearranging of the first part of the name Miranda in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (93). Rudolph J. Landry believes that the origin of Rima's name probably has to do with a reference to the anatomy of birds: "a *rima* is an anatomical structure in the larynx; the *rima* is the passage in the glottis between the vocal chords and the aretenoid cartilages, and it is the upper *rima* which gives utterance to the note." Landry conjectures that the name is "drawn from its scientific context retaining its association with bird sound, and given an erotic quality as the name of the bird-girl" (545–46). However, the *rima* is not a structure exclusively found in birds. *Concise Medical Dictionary* defines the *rima glottidis* as "the space between the vocal folds" with no reference to any specific animal ("rima n."). William Tillinghast Winsor adds to Landry's notion the fact that the Spanish noun *rima* means *rhyme*. It is likely that Hudson has used the name "in both literal senses" (117).

domestic, representation-friendly half-distance, emphasised by Abel's keeping her at arm's length when he wants her to stand in front of him so that he can look at her. Her hair, previously forming a "loose cloud," is now divided in plaits (92). Instead of being like "a humming-bird moving about in an aerial dance among the flowers—a living prismatic gem that changes its colour with every change of position," being "green and gold and flame-coloured, the beams changing to visible flakes as they fall, dissolving into nothing, to be succeeded by others and yet others," her brilliance has disappeared and she is now like a "common dull-plumaged little bird" (93). The house is thus a place of 'representations' where immanence is abandoned and where the tranquillising, objectifying, and rationalising, compartmentalising systems of representivity have the upper hand. Rima is little more than a domestic, a pale maid who runs errands for her patron. The text calls attention to the objectifying rule of representivity in various ways. In her room, Rima has a picture, a representation, of the Virgin Mother. The importance of the picture is denied by the immanence of the woods:

'Out here in the wood it is all gone—like this,' and stooping quickly, she raised a little yellow sand on her palm, then let it run away through her fingers.

Thus she illustrated how all the matters she had been taught slipped from her mind when she was out-of-doors, out of sight of the picture. (104)¹¹

Thus, in the vast, open forest, there is an immanent mutiny, rebelling against representivity and transcendence. Rima's refusal to submit to the constricting transcendence is present in her movements in the forest. Abel tries to make her come closer, but she vanishes (101). He calls her name, but his words are sent back to him. He tries to "catch" her (107), but she vanishes "like a rainbow," sometimes hiding in the "immense aerial palace" in the trees (108). Being like "a shadow in the shadow" (112), Rima constantly resists his efforts, often concealing herself in a "hiding-place" (77). Only when he gives this up, entering a state of letting-go, is she "near" him (107). These movements from vast distances to closeness, as well as her "bird-like wildness" (102), emphasise her denial of transcendence, representivity, and effort.

¹¹ Accentuating the priority of presentation over representation (of presence over sign and of self-presence over image), Hudson declares his preference for living birds and his dislike for those that are essentially discursive: "Who delights not in a bird? Yet how few among us find any pleasure in reading of them in natural history books! The living bird, viewed closely and fearless of our presence, is so much more to the mind than all that is written" (*Birds in Town and Village* 103).

Rima, “the forest girl” (75), co-exists with all wild creatures. She does not want to hurt any living being. The wild animals, on their part, “know those who are friendly towards them” (118). Consequently, she does not eat meat. Instead, she feeds on “wild berries and gums” (100), thus being more like a wild animal than a human being. When she is out in the wood, she is “free as the wind” and impossible to domesticate, just like a “fiery-hearted little humming-bird” that stays “suspended motionless” before it disappears (101). Again, there is a fleetingness and an airy quality that makes her a kind of immanent rebel, revolting against weight, borders, and closure. She is saturated by everything in the forest, at the same time as she is omnipresent in it:

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*. (112, emphasis added)

All the creatures, plants and sounds are thus present and concentrated in Rima. She is the forest condensed. In her, it is possible to see everything that is in the wood, the wood thus being part of her. Moreover, in her voice, the sounds of the wind, of running water, bees, and organ-birds are present, not in a simple one-sided way, but in their immanent complexity of modes of being. She “is everywhere in the wood, seeing all things” (119) and, indeed, she *is* the wood, since all “the separate and fragmentary beauty and melody and graceful motion found scattered throughout nature” are “concentrated and harmoniously combined in her” (121).¹²

I would argue that these phrasings point to the elusive ontology of *Green Mansions*—to the unstated idea, uncovered in this essay as the phenomenological idea of the novel, that Rima is presented as a personification of the priority in the universe of immanence over transcendence, of presentation over representation, of intimacy over interactivity, and of absolute closeness over relationship. I argue that Rima’s

¹² J. R. Hamilton views Rima as a symbol of nature, thus reducing her to a representation of something instead of accepting her as an immanent presentation of herself. According to Hamilton, “Hudson attempted the impossible task of creating an ethereal being symbolic of nature who is, at the same time, a young girl of flesh and blood, beautiful and desirable” (66–67). In my opinion, Hamilton makes two mistakes here: he views Rima as a representation, thus missing her immanent qualities, and he forwards a conjecture about the author’s intention that is highly speculative.

constant darting-away and sudden materialisation at point-blank proximity are expressive of a refusal of a culture dominated by a *mania for establishing networks of representations-and-relations* by means of sightings, images, and perceptions operating at a convenient and controlled scope of a nicely calculated *half-distance*. Rima is hardly ever manifest at a half-distance similar to that of portrait photography (when she is, her immanent qualities are gone), and her dislike of Abel's recurring efforts to hold her at arm's length (like a bird gazed at in a cage, like a fish admired in an aquarium, or like a bouquet of flowers placed in a vase) is expressive precisely of her instinctive refutation of any reduction of feeling to representation.¹³

As we have seen, Rima is a creature of the earth. Likewise, her speech is a language of immanence—a language that Abel appreciates but ultimately fails to understand on account of his roots in the immanence-hostile world of representivity with its cult of transcendence, go-betweens, representations, divisiveness, compartmentalisation, and rational functionalism.¹⁴ Abel finds Rima's speech "more soul-penetrating than any bird-music" (105). For him, it is "a language without words, suggesting more than words to the soul." Still, he wants to make her adopt a language of 'representations,' of word-pictures that (unlike the warbling of a bird) have an in-front-of feel and an in-front-of function. Abel unwittingly removes himself from

¹³ *Green Mansions* was written in the very decade that saw the birth of phenomenology and non-figurative painting, two movements that worked self-consciously with theoretic issues to overthrow the notion of life, feeling, and art as imitation, copying, and representing. In his analyses of Kandinsky's paintings, Michel Henry calls attention to the aims of early twentieth century intellectual vanguards to challenge the metaphysics of representivity. As the "re-" prefix (in *re/presentation*) suggests, re/presentivity wants to show-again. It wants to put on display something that supposedly already exists before the showing-act takes place. In non-figurative art this reactionary reflex is made impossible, since it is impossible to discern any 'thing' or 'figure' that the painting would hypothetically be wishing to put on show. The lines and the colours are themselves that which is on display. Michel Henry argues that not only oil and colour (in painting) but also *feeling* (in life in general) has first of all this quality of not being a showing-again or showing-of but the quality of a sheer (direct and immanent) showing. If Rima were a mere representation of some sort of purity or innocence in nature, her presence would be metaphysical rather than physical; for as Michel Henry persuasively argues, art "once again becomes the metaphysical [type of] knowledge" if it backslides into the business of promoting the delusion that "nothing but objects truly exist"—each representation being an object reflected or caught in another object (sign, artefact, etc). The "discovery" made by phenomenology and by non-figurative art is a "rediscovery" that brings us back to a freshness of seeing where "the core of our being" can once more become manifest (*Seeing the Invisible* 20). It is my contention that Rima in *Green Mansions* embodies that sort of freshness, rediscovery, and core—a state of affairs that is absolutely antithetical to the notion of representation in general, and to the notion of nature-representivity in particular.

¹⁴ Amy D. Ronner discusses this problematic within the commonplace notion of the ineffable, a line of analysis that is not altogether at odds with my discussion of the contradiction between presentation and representation. Ronner observes that Abel and the protagonist of *A Crystal Age* both "realize the futility of trying to find the one adjective which accurately captures this evershifting beauty. When faced with an impossible task, that of communicating infinitude itself, the characters discover that language becomes a hindrance rather than a vehicle" (2–3).

Rima's universe of immanence by constantly keeping her at arm's length: "look into my eyes, and you will see me there" (106). He wants her to call him by his name. This, however, is a representation belonging to the 'old' Abel, the one not yet permeated by pre-representative newness. Newness is gradually infused in Abel. He returns to the Indian village for a while, but finds no one there. Instead, he spends time on "idle thought" (124). When sitting by the stream, he looks at his two lives, the old, "artificial" one, with its "empty round of gaieties" which he led in Caracas, and the "real one" that gives him a feeling of being renewed (125). Thus, to Rima, Abel is indeed not his real name (111). Their common language, Spanish, is for her a mere system of 'representations,' it "is not speaking" (167). For her words are words-as-warbling, not words-as-representing. Her language is immanently expressive of the immanence that feeling at bottom is, not a discourse for putting a tag on items that have been systematised for factual denotation and fixed reference. The only human being who understands her language is, ironically, a creature who is not an interactive communicator, her dead mother: "Only mother is here—always with me" (104). When Rima and her mother 'talk' to each other, life and death co-exist in a denial of any firm separation of living and dead organisms: "I talk to her just the same. Everything I see I point out, and tell her everything. In the daytime—in the woods, when we are together. And at night when I lie down I cross my arms on my breast—so, and say: 'Mother, mother, now you are in my arms; let us go to sleep together'" (103).

Rima, who is "a being apart and sacred" (162), longs for her own people, for those who would understand her immanent language, for those who are free from the tyranny of the mechanical system of representivity that—through the control of various males—has kept her in bondage since childhood. In order to find the people who are immanent to her, she makes Nuflo and Abel accompany her to Riolama, which is where her ancestors once lived. Riolama is this side of the world, "a blank on the map." It is "the most difficult of access" (148), thus uncharted as well as visited by very few people. This place, untouched by the 'world,' is immanently present in Rima's name: "When I was a child, and the priest baptized me, he named me Riolama—the place where my mother was found" (149). Rima's ancestors constitute a people this side of the world: "They had been preserved because they inhabited a place apart, some deep valley perhaps, guarded on all sides by lofty mountains and impenetrable forests and marshes" (202). This isolation, unaffected by 'the world,'

has made it possible for a people to immanently belong to themselves, to become autonomous and free on terms dictated by themselves without transcendent intercession or aid. However, for some reason, these people were wiped out. Only Rima's pregnant mother survived.

Abel, Rima, and Nuflo reach Riolama, but Rima's people are not to be found. She now realises that they do not exist any longer. However, this is the place where she and Abel find a closeness, or cohesion: "it seemed to me that at last, at last, the shadow that had rested between us had vanished, that we were united in perfect love and confidence, and that speech was superfluous" (208). By now, Abel has cast off "the dull leaden mask of mere intellectual curiosity," giving way to an intensity of feeling that is something new compared to the "weariness" of a "former passion" (121). The immanent feeling of love's immanence infuses Rima with newness. The new Rima is not the old Rima. She is "no longer Rima, although Rima still" (156). Newness takes her back to affectivity as the life-root in which her ancestors had grown into a people undefiled by 'the world.' Having been uprooted as a child, she has never tasted love as such. It is difficult to know, however, to what extent Abel really understands love as an "inexplicable thing" (209). He talks about the inexplicable, but does he really grasp it? I would suggest that Abel is really at a loss in the very sphere that he thinks he is discovering and elucidating. This may explain, I submit, why he perpetually finds himself at a remove from Rima whenever he momentarily enjoys the delusion of being immanent to her; to her feelings, to her language, to her movements, and to her universe. In his closeness to Rima, there is for Abel often the fleeting impression of a sweet dissolution of the interval, but this gap seems to constantly return as soon as it has vanished—showing, I would argue, his inability to climb out of his social conditioning. I submit that *Green Mansions* is based on the protagonist's discursive (language-driven, sign-driven, and representation-driven) alienation from a place and from a type of people he is predestined to misunderstand and misrepresent in the very act of coming exceedingly close to understanding and discerning them. There are, to be sure, brief instants when Abel and Rima are totally in touch: "we are not now apart, I hiding in the wood, you seeking, but together, saying the same things. In your language—yours and now mine" (212). This affective immanence is a cohesion on the hither side of the world, every mundane person being excluded from immanence's absolute intimacy: "Not with us, nor we with them. But we are everywhere alone together, apart—we two"

(214). However, Abel still does not understand “that finer language in which alone her swift thoughts and vivid emotions could be expressed” (212), making a “perfect union” impossible (213).¹⁵

Still, Rima is happy that she has found love and she hastens back home to the forest. Since, like a bird immanent to the air, to the streams, to the clouds, and to a whole domain of animal life uninhibited by representivity, she moves much swifter than the men, she does not want to wait for them. However, when Nuflo and Abel reach the wood, something is wrong. Rima is not there and Abel encounters an Indian. Since the Indians have not previously dared to go to this place in fear of “an evil being” (74), which is “the mysterious girl who could not be shot” (194), he realises that something terrible must have happened. He tries to regain the Indians’ confidence and, finally, he finds out that they have burnt Rima to death.¹⁶ He escapes and finds his way to an old enemy of the tribe, where he tries to make their leader Managa attack his former friends. He succeeds. Soon everybody in the village is dead. What makes him realise what he has done is the sight of the old Indian woman Cla-cla, a former friend of his. In the living Cla-cla, there are some immanent bird-like qualities, although not in the beautiful elusive way as in Rima. Instead, there is something rough but still charming about Cla-cla’s appearance. Her name, Abel thinks, is perhaps an imitation of a bird cry and there is something owlish in her face and her eyes (36, 173). It is this woman, with her bird-like qualities, that causes a change in Abel, making him leave the dead village and return to the forest (244). Here, scenes oscillate as if he were in a state of reverie:

Scenes in which I had been principal actor came and went, as in a dream when the will slumbers: now with devilish ingenuity and

¹⁵ Ronner views Rima in *Green Mansions* and Yoletta in Hudson’s novel *A Crystal Age* as “momentary gifts to the protagonists, Smith and Abel, who can perceive them as the embodiments of avian grace, as true representations of the ever-changing beauty of earth” (66). In that type of interpretation, the girls are little more than representations of nature. As mere exemplifications of something transcendent to them, they become deprived in such a reading of that which I am highlighting in this study, namely the young woman as a totally personal and totally individualised manifestation of something unique to herself, absolutely immanent to her own personality and reality. Ronner subscribes to a commonplace anthropocentricism in regarding the protagonist’s yearning for a marriage bond as being merely expressive of “human desire for pure communication and intimacy with the soul of Nature.” From Ronner’s viewpoint, the reason for the male’s failure to “sustain a communion” is that Rima and Yoletta are “spirits of Nature” that “suggest our perfected selves” (66). This view places the (male) human being in the centre, thus missing the phenomenological idea of Rima as an immanent being who can only be defined in terms of her own reality.

¹⁶ Hamilton regards Rima as a “symbol of nature destroyed by the brutality of men” (66). To be sure, brutal men do indeed destroy Rima, yet I do not think that Rima is to be viewed as a symbol. She is not a representation of something, but something, a presentation of herself in herself, a form of sheer immanence. It is Rima in her immanent presence that is destroyed.

persistence I was working on Managa's mind; now standing motionless in the forest listening for that sweet, mysterious melody; now staring aghast at old Cla-cla's wide-open glassy eyes and white hair dabbled in blood; then suddenly, in the cave at Riolama, I was fondly watching the slow return of life and colour to Rima's still face. (245–46)

Events that have occurred at various times and in different places, and that are normally seen as separate, are apperceived holistically in a single affective hologram containing them all, thus denying intervals in time as well as space and forming one single instance where different occasions merge.¹⁷

In the wood, Abel tries to survive. He is hungry and tired. Finally, he goes to the burnt down house where Nuflo and Rima used to live. He discovers Nuflo's skeleton and buries it. He also finds food, stored away by the old man, which leaves him time both to think and build a shelter. His hut is built on the spot where Rima had her bower, which gives Abel the feeling of holding Rima in his arms and being absolutely immanent to her again. "To be with Rima again—my lost Rima recovered—mine, mine at last," he exclaims. In spite of death, there is no interval. Rima and Abel are one entity, no longer parted as they were previously, when being like two raindrops: "now they had touched and were not two, but one inseparable drop, crystallized beyond change, not to be disintegrated by time, nor shattered by death's blow, nor resolved by any alchemy" (250). The irresistible adhesion fusing the two raindrops is now present in Rima and Abel, who form an immanent cohesion unhindered by time, space, and death. Life and death, normally regarded as binary oppositions, co-exist in an immanent closeness, thus denying the transcendence dominated by division and contradiction.

However, Abel still has a faint hope of a "reunion" (254), of finding Rima alive. He starts looking for her in the wood, but finds nothing. Instead, he tries to find the place where Kua-Kó told him she was burnt to death. He locates it and also discovers her bones, which he brings to the shelter. This gives him a newness, "a second calm" (257). He finds a jar, previously used by Nuflo for storing food, where he places Rima's remnants. The time Abel passes in the wood is now floating, one moment becoming an immeasurable amount of time: "in that place I had sat for many a thousand years, . . . and there would I sit, unmoving, immovable, for many a thousand years to come" (258). There are no distinct days. All Abel's previous years

¹⁷ As Gaston Bachelard argues, reveries have a profound influence on human beings, since the "values that belong to daydreaming mark humanity in its depths," making the "dwelling-places of the past remain in us for all time" (6).

are “like a small island immeasurably far away, scarcely discernible, in the midst of that endless desolate waste of nameless days” (258–59). In other words, time forms a continuum as an instant stretches out to a temporal immensity. Conversely, extended time goes into a brief moment. Moreover, Rima and Abel constitute one single entity as soon as Abel shuts his eyes: “then Rima’s arms would be round my neck; the silky mist of her hair against my face, her flowery *breath mixing with my breath*” (261, emphasis added). Rima also appears before him, talking to him and saying he must live: “I will wait patiently, and we shall be together in the end, and see each other without disguise. Nothing shall divide us” (262). Thus, the cohesion is there even in the future, unhindered by time and space understood as lineally paraded units of a geometric representation of an objectified space-time ‘world’.¹⁸

Finally, Abel leaves the forest and heads towards civilisation. During the journey, he falls ill. At times he walks in “half-delirious night-fancies” (268), i.e., a kind of feverish reverie, where objective time and space have melted into a timeless spaciousness of feeling. At last, he reaches Georgetown, where he settles down. Although he is back in civilisation, he is profoundly changed and infused with a mode of newness. Abel no longer has any interest in worldly issues such as politics, sports, or wealth. Instead, he is in possession of “*his world—the world of nature and of the spirit*” (15). He has become a softer, more receptive person who is liked by everyone and who loves everybody, even his enemies. Although gone, the flying birds, the forest, and Rima are immanently present in him, actively constituting a new Abel who has become the passive beneficiary of a richness he did not need to constitute. All that remains of the embodied immanence of Rima and Abel is finally to be their ashes (272)—but in the light of what has transpired, that is more than enough.

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In these pages, I have shown that *Green Mansions* is a novel based on the idea of immanence. The protagonist is allured by a lifestyle committed to a priority of feeling over representation. Still, he is intermittently unable to apprehend the source-point of immanence, which he perceives as representation rather than presentation. Being

¹⁸ When calling Abel’s state of mind a “brooding insanity” and a “madness” (69), Hamilton is in my view making an error that expresses his failure to grasp the drift and meaning of the text. Without a grasp of the phenomenon of immanence in *Green Mansions*, this dream-like state of mind may be interpreted as indicative of a supposed aberration of mind.

conditioned by a culture dominated by representations (i.e., turning every presence into a sign 'of' something else), he is unable to take Rima for what she is: a living instantiation of immanent life rather than a representation of his dreams. Rima's fluidity, her tendency to live immanently in the fleeting flash of each passing second, is too much for Abel's representation-directed gaze. Without noticing it, he tends to keep his beloved at arm's length, viewing her as a picture or a portrait. He obstinately keeps imposing his language-dominated mind-set on her being, failing to become assimilated into her language of leaves, wind, and wings. In presenting nothing beyond herself—not even her own image or idea—Rima is impossible to fully grasp for Abel. She embodies an omnipresence of immanent life. She is the living body of immanence in all its non-representable and pre-linguistic forms. Yet in losing her, the protagonist retains the feeling of her immanent presence. In so far as it does not backslide into representation (into a Rima-picture or into a Rima-word) this sensation has sustainable life, thus constituting a silent yet persisting resistance to a world-view based on representivity.

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