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The fantastic black panther in the writing of Charles G. D. Roberts : Forging Canadian national identity from primeval nature

Robert Summerby-Murray

- 1 Alan Weiss argues that the fantastic has assumed greater prominence in Canadian literature over the past two decades but has been seldom studied academically (Weiss, 2006). His analysis of contemporary urban fantasy writing in Canadian settings draws explicitly on John Clute's definition of fantastic literature as involving "texts where fantasy and the mundane world intersect and interweave throughout a tale" (Clute and Grant, 1997 : 975). While Weiss's focus is commendable, it ignores the historical examples of the use of the fantastic in Canadian nature writing. This article argues that rather than being built solely on a realist perspective, Canadian national identity in the post-Confederation era was influenced also by fantastic and magical depictions of the natural world, particularly the anthropomorphizing of wilderness animals as part of creating a mystique of the wild.
- 2 The existing scholarly literature suggests that there is a longstanding component of the fantastic in the cultural expression of the Canadian wilderness. Robert's animal stories are particularly interesting examples as they demonstrate numerous positive depictions of fantastic, talking, anthropomorphised animals – as well as several negative examples. This article focuses on the black panther of the woods between Dorchester and Westcock, New Brunswick, a quasi-magical creature that lurks but never attacks, is present and menaces but never actually overcomes its human prey. Eventually, even the fantastic menace is subdued or diverted.
- 3 The anthropomorphizing of animals is a well-established device. While some of this is associated with children's stories, assigning anthropomorphized motive allows animals to depict important human values. We wish to be 'lion-hearted' while perhaps abhorring

being as 'stubborn as a mule'. Some of these stories are important mechanisms for conveying social values and appear as cautionary tales (including a specific genre carrying this title – as found in Belloc, 1907). Peter Rabbit's life would be much easier if he accepted the institutional authority of Mr. McGregor – despite Beatrix Potter's celebration of his maverick independence (Potter, 1902). Noting his Canadian origins, Winnie the Pooh really should keep his paws out of the honey jar – as should his young readers, says A.A. Milne (Milne, 1926). In case one is tempted to dismiss these simply as isolated and playful examples, note also the adoption of this device by both C.S. Lewis and J. R.R. Tolkien – including the helpful, morally-upright (and almost dutifully Canadian) talking beavers of Narnia in the recent movie of the same name (Jacobs, 2005).

- 4 The use of talking, thinking, rational and irrational (and/or instinctive) animals – one example of the fantastic or at least non-realist presentation of the natural world – is a key component of the creation of a Canadian national identity in the late 19th century, the period in which Charles G. D. Roberts was writing. We are familiar, of course, with the positive examples of this such as the friendly beaver, industrious, diligent and devoted, lending his image to the logo of the Canadian Pacific Railway as early as the 1880s as part of the explicit nation-building exercise. The original logo was obtained from the Sleeman Brewery in Guelph, Ontario, in the closing decades of the nineteenth century – and the brewery purchased the logo back from the railway in the 1990s as part of its effort to brand its beer using the national icon of the beaver, confirming many of the arguments developed by Margot Francis (2011). Francis takes a considerably more critical perspective in her exploration of the beaver within an “anthropomorphic discourse of Canadian imperial history” (34). In tracing the representation of the Canadian beaver, *Castor canadensis*, Francis points to the construction of a ‘beaver society’ as part of an imperial power discourse, a society in which the hardworking, socially-organized animal is an exemplar of the created colonial society, serving the needs (and even fashion whims) of metropolitan society. Francis argues that natural history writing functions as a literary genre through which textual representations and graphic images of the beaver made their way into Canadian public consciousness from the sixteenth century onwards. This representation of nature became an agent of imperial power over settler societies and indigenous peoples, who themselves were judged by the conventions of the animal environment around them, a process of eco-criticism that deserves further attention (Francis, 2011 : 25). The forms of agency here are numerous, ranging from the gender politics of beaver social organisation and industriousness (a contradictory interpretation if one acknowledges the pseudo-hermaphroditic designation of the beaver) to political caricature, sexual slang, and commercial promotion (from the Hudson's Bay Company to the patriotic familiarity of the Roots brand), as detailed by Francis and critiqued further by Jacques Bovet (2005). Similarly, Carrie Dawson (2011) elaborates the significance of the beaver (and its representation) in building Canadian cultural identity through a discussion of sympathetic relationships between human and animal in the writings of Grey Owl, extending interpretation well beyond the earlier romanticized views of authors such as Dickson (1939). Similar to the beaver, the Canadian moose enjoys a generally positive depiction : large, slow moving, bumbling, but instantly recognizable. There are other examples of the positive depictions of wild animals, co-opting these components of the Canadian wilderness to national, imperial, and metropolitan purpose.
- 5 Ene-Reet Soovik explores the broader Canadian context through the lens of bio-semiotics and an analysis of Margaret Atwood's poetry collection *The Animals in That Country*,

particular in the blurring of boundaries between human and animal and the creation of the fantastic (Soovik, 2006). Atwood describes, for example, how Brian the Still-Hunter is transformed by his skin growing fur and his head becoming “heavy with antlers” as he contemplates the animals he must kill (Soovik, 151). Francis (2011 : 58) argues similarly that the figure of the beaver in artist Joyce Wieland’s work (particularly the 1971 sculpture *The Spirit of Canada Suckling the French and the English Beavers*) represents a crossing between human and animal, portraying “fantastical relationships of miscegenation” and suggesting the “risky and fantastical ways in which a natural world might be reinvented in the hopes of creating a more completely textured, and very real, material world”. Christl Verduyn (1995) encounters this point through her analysis of Marion Engel’s 1976 novel *Bear*, pointing to the fantastical crossing of boundaries as the main female character becomes sexually involved with the animal. Carrie Dawson’s (2011) interpretation of Grey Owl’s (Archibald Belaney’s) writing notes particularly how “the representation of beavers creates the conditions for boundary crossing,” reinforcing Janice Fiamengo’s (2007) summary of the continued “controversy about the species boundary.”

- 6 In the late nineteenth century, the work of Ernest Thompson Seton and Charles G. D. Roberts, two of the post-Confederation writers, framed a national iconography of the wilderness, making it accessible and available to Canadian children and taming the wild through the positive depictions of the fantastic, a point noted by Alexander Burnett in setting the cultural context for the establishment of state-sanctioned wildlife management in this country (Burnett, 1999). But it is an over simplification to interpret these animal stories as agents of an inevitable, positive, modernist progress of colonizing space, wildlife and peoples. Instead, the current article argues that the presence of fantastical and negative implications for humans, irrational and instinctive animal behaviours that cannot be explained by rational anthropomorphising, and the crossing of boundaries between the real and the fantastic are significant components in framing a constructed national identity, particularly in exploring for readers the dangers of wilderness and creating this as a backdrop to human activity in Canada. The use of the fantastic suggests that the wilderness cannot be explained completely by a rational, Darwinian or ecological understanding of nature. Instead, it is the unexplainable, magical and fantastic that sets limits for action in the Canadian environment and psyche. In this sense, rather than simply a “threatening indigeneity”, as Brian Johnson (2007 : 345) describes Roberts’ wolf characters, the fantastical wild crosses the boundaries into human action either as a form of moral allegory (as Robert MacDonald (1980) argues), as nationalist sentiment (James Polk (1972 : 58) writes that Roberts’ stories reflected a “suspicion that a fanged America lurks in the bushes, waiting for the kill”), or a post-Darwinian statement of shared base instincts in which the animals “tearing each other to pieces, dripping with blood, driven to frenzy by hunger or oestrus” are actually ourselves (Gold, 1984 : 79).

Charles G. D. Roberts and the construction of Canadian national identity

- 7 The foundational contributions of Charles G. D. Roberts to Canadian literature are well known and need not detain us here. Considerable scholarship exists already on Roberts as poet, as prose author, and literary giant whose work traversed late Victorian views of

nature and catalyzed the development of a truly Canadian writing into the early twentieth century (Cappon, 1932 ; Pomeroy, 1943 ; Keith, 1969 ; Polk, 1972 ; Clever, 1984 ; MacMillan, 1984 ; Adams, 1986. See also further secondary sources at http://w3.stu.ca/stu/sites/nble/r/roberts_g_d.html). There is no doubt of Roberts' role in exploring Canadian wilderness and bringing it to a public hungry for knowledge of a vast country, particularly in a period of rapid urbanization and increasing separation between rural and urban. Similarly, his active engagement with a Romanticized 'true north strong and free' created mythologies that took various forms of cultural expression. Some were novels that situated economic processes amid the local experience (such as Roberts (1906) *The Heart that Knows*) ; others included an official state-sanctioned historical narrative about the Canadian environment, seen in Roberts' role in writing history textbooks commissioned by the Canadian federal government and major publishers, texts designed explicitly to educate young Canadians about the wilderness and its significance to the Canadian economy, polity and society and part of a concerted attempt by governments, publishers and journalists to construct a coherent national identity (Roberts, 1897 ; Warkentin, 2010). The irony of Roberts' 1897 text being published by a United States publishing house appears to have escaped notice.

- 8 It has been noted already that Roberts' representation of animals in the service of national identity was not simply romanticized. He was one of the first 'animal authors' to explore the ecology and biology of animal behaviour and to posit a sense of ecological complementarity (such as the symbiosis of survival in 'Do seek their meat from God' (Roberts, 1892) and elaborated particularly in Roberts' introduction to *The Kindred of the Wild* (1935)). This more realistic and biologically-accurate approach was novel but was still critiqued by naturalists such as John Burroughs who in 1903 in *The Atlantic Monthly* disputed the suggestion that instinct could be replaced by reason. No less than President Theodore Roosevelt expanded this point, writing in *Everybody's Magazine* in 1907 and accusing Roberts (among others) of falsifying animal behaviour and being 'nature fakirs' – although he did allow that "Many of the nature stories of Charles G.D. Roberts are avowedly fairy tales, and no one is deceived by them" (Adams, 1986 : 95-96, 103-104 ; Lucas, 1958 : vii). Usefully, Adams (1986) notes the corruption by later journalists of Roosevelt's xenophobic 'fakir' to 'faker' with its more obvious denotation of deception.
- 9 But even allowing for a romanticized anthropomorphizing and the tension between instinct and reason, most interpreters of Roberts' work have focused on the positive attributes of animal behaviour, assuming it can be explained by rationalism or instinct, leaving aside the darker, more disturbing, fantastic representations that are present in Roberts' depictions of animals in his numerous stories and poetry. There are notable exceptions in this literature such as Brian Johnson's (2007) discussion of wolves and Thomas Hodd's (2007) argument that Roberts' animals reflect his interests in the supernatural and the occult. Similarly, Janice Fiamengo's (2010) insightful analysis argues that there is considerable ambiguity and even supernatural darkness in Roberts' work, particularly in using animals to shine a light on humans : "we discern a consciousness at once undeniable and not fully knowable—an engrossing, alien self whose contemplation helps us to return to nature".
- 10 The intention of this article is to contribute further to Johnson's, Hodd's and Fiamengo's analyses by suggesting that the fantastic, exemplified by the figure of the black panther, is an important device in the construction of Canadian identity. It is argued here that Canadian identity draws upon disturbing, uncertain, at times negative and even

fantastical conceptions of Canadian nature and the experience of the wilderness. Rather than simply a set of natural resources to be fished, felled and farmed, Canadian nature is a complex lived experience, not wholly explainable by rationalist interpretation, not wholly subject to the processes of imperial exploration and liberal capitalism but instead fraught with danger and uncertainty.

- 11 There are immediate parallels with the work of the Brothers Grimm, but Roberts' interpretations of the wild are not intended to connect to a pre-industrial folklore. Rather, the narratives are cautionary and explanatory, framing a conception of nature and ecology that supported the growth of a colonial sense of self and justified the actions of a colonizing force supporting metropolitan motives. But the depiction of the fantastic animal destabilizes the thin veneer of modernist rationalism in the colonizing process and thus creates a dark, even Conradian, counter-narrative in the construction of a Canadian national identity. The device of the black panther appears not only in 'Lou's Clarionet' (1892) the focus of this article, but in several other short stories written between 1892 and 1905, a period in which Roberts' stories were gaining in circulation and popularity. In some of these stories such as 'Do seek their meat from God' (1892), Roberts' rehearses the tension between biological instinct and assigned anthropomorphic rationality. In 'Lou's Clarionet', however, the black panther device is more sinister and fantastic, exposing a threatening construction of the wilderness and positioning it as a challenge to civilizing and colonizing Christianity.

The road from St. Stephen's, Second Westcock, Christmas Eve

- 12 'Lou's Clarionet' is a curiously-overlooked short story, published initially in 1892 and set in the small community of Second Westcock, New Brunswick. 'Lou's Clarionet' received its widest circulation in an 1896 collection, *Around the Camp-fire*. Roberts himself described the collection as juvenilia although John Adams (1986 : 66-67) suggests that while "the tales in *Around the Campfire* have been all but forgotten... it might be argued that a few of them...deserve to be remembered longer." Certainly, 'Lou's Clarionet' is absent from most analyses of Roberts' work, including the otherwise-comprehensive listings of Roberts' work cited in Hodd (2007) and Fiamengo (2010). Similarly, it is mentioned in none of the other secondary literature cited in this article, despite it representing several of the themes identified in other of Roberts' works.
- 13 'Lou's Clarionet' tells the story of the parish rector, his five year old son and fifteen year old niece, Lou Allison, returning from a Christmas Eve service in St. Stephen's Anglican Church in the tiny community of Second Westcock, New Brunswick. St. Stephen's Church was built in 1842 on Second Westcock Hill but was torn down in the 1920s. Today little more than forest camps and blueberry fields, Second Westcock was a frontier location in the late nineteenth century as harvestable timber was removed and land was cleared for agriculture. As the rector and his party travel through the dark woods, heading home after the Christmas Eve service, they are followed by a mysterious black panther, which appears phantom-like from the forest and threatens them menacingly. Just as the panther is about to pounce, Lou lets out a series of blasts on her clarinet, frightening off the strange beast and ensuring the safe deliverance of the sleigh and its party from the dark woods.

- 14 In December 1994, Richard McConnell, then Rector of the Parish of Sackville, New Brunswick, adapted 'Lou's Clarionet' for performance as part of an Advent lessons and carols service at St. Ann's Church, Westcock (with organ accompaniment from the present author).. That McConnell, in his role as parish rector, should adapt 'Lou's Clarionet' for the use of St. Ann's Church was highly symbolic : Roberts' father, Charles Goodridge Roberts, was rector of the parish between 1860 and 1874. Many have argued that these years were entirely formative for his son, author and poet Charles G.D. Roberts, in terms of the subject matter and evocation of the natural environment in his work. Obvious examples include Roberts' poems 'Tantramar Revisited' and 'Westcock Hill'. Also symbolic of the intersections of wilderness and national identity is the appropriation of the First Nations name 'Oakshaak', Anglicized variously as 'Veskak', 'Wesquak' and, finally 'Westcock', the location of St. Ann's Church (Hamilton, 2004:34).
- 15 This performance of McConnell's adaptation was part of a late 20th century 'Roberts renaissance' that included a scholarly conference hosted by Mount Allison University in 1983, the republishing of several of Roberts' works in new editions (including *The Heart that Knows* in two editions, 1984 and 2002 respectively), and the attempt to identify the Town of Sackville and the Tantramar region generally as 'Roberts Country' to encourage tourism (MacMillan, 1984 ; Scobie, 2009). While Shauna McCabe (1998) has pointed out how highly contested this claim of the significance of Roberts' work was in relation to other interests (especially those of First Nations, Acadian and other settler groups – notably waves of Yorkshire and Loyalist immigrants), the construction of Roberts' work (and persona) as a founding mythology for contemporary tourism and economic development gained significant traction. I have argued elsewhere that the construction of Roberts' significance through these various media contributed to an assertion of community identity on the part of residents of Westcock especially (and as opposed to the appropriation of Roberts' image by residents of neighbouring Sackville), who conceived of Roberts as a national literary hero with very real connection to their landscape and society (Summerby-Murray, 1999 ; Summerby-Murray, 2013). A further component of the renaissance (and to some extent rehabilitation) of Roberts was the construction of a new Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada commemorative plaque at St. Ann's Church (the 'old grey church in the woods' from Roberts' 'Westcock Hill' poem), noting the significance of Roberts' work to Canadian identity (Scobie, 2009 : 88-93). The Tantramar Historic Sites Committee lobbied strongly for the commemorative plaque, despite the complication of a National Historic Sites and Monuments Board policy that an individual could be commemorated only on one monument. (Roberts is commemorated on a plaque in Fredericton, New Brunswick, along with fellow Confederation writers Bliss Carmen and Francis Sherman.) A successful case was made for the Westcock plaque on the grounds of Roberts' significance to the particular region and community. Significantly for this article, the plaque sits at the entry to the 'Church Woods' on the road to Second Westcock and Dorchester, the very road on which the action of 'Lou's Clarionet' takes place and a site selected in preference to one overlooking the Tantramar Marshes (and their evocation of 'Tantramar Revisited' and other of Roberts' pastoral poetry and prose).

Romance, reality and the fantastic black panther

- 16 In its 1896 *Around the Camp-Fire* version, 'Lou's Clarionet' begins by establishing the romanticized setting of a small church in the woods, not Roberts' rector father's home church of St. Ann's, Westcock, but the isolated companion church of St. Stephen's in Second Westcock. Like St. Ann's, however, St. Stephen's is described as "quaint and old-fashioned, ...gray with the beating of many winters" (117). It is an otherwise bleak scene : winter snow, houses straggling down the hillside at the margin of the forest, "an uneven and desolate churchyard, strewn with graves and snowdrifts" (117) embodying the human cost of creating a society in a harsh land. This is an archetypal scene of Canadian identity, complete with swirling snow and biting winds, reflecting the struggle within the wilderness, overcoming the harshness of environment through perseverance, reinforcing the northness of Robert Service's phrase 'to us was the Northland given' and a manifest destiny for an emerging nation. Roberts' description of the church interior continues the theme : "the poor, bare chance!" is "flanked by two towering pulpits of white pine" (118), co-opting even the iconic northern tree species for the purposes of a civilizing Christianity.
- 17 Roberts further contrasts the civilizing spiritual transcendence of the first hymn in the service, accompanied by the rector's niece 15 year old Lou Allison on clarinet, with the threatening wintry scene outdoors. Affirming Roberts' words that "Never before had such music been heard there" (119), a character from the church congregation suggests in rural dialect after the service that the clarinet "jest drawed down the angels from heaven to sing with us tonight" (120), prefiguring the magical possibilities of the instrument against the rudeness of the surrounding world and enlisting the aid of the heavenly host, whose "voices was all swimming in a smoke like" (120).
- 18 Roberts further prefigures the later part of the story by having the rector wonder aloud in conversation whether the sound of the clarinet would frighten off a 'regular' forest creature like a bear rather than just the simple task of drawing down the angels from heaven – but he is assured that such an everyday creature would be "jest scared to death" (121). That is, the wilderness would be overcome and conquered by this aural component of a muscular Christianity, the form of Christian endeavour embodied not only in the character of the rector of the story but, as Carrie MacMillan has explored, in Roberts' representation of his own rector father in his other works (MacMillan, 2002 : xiii).
- 19 The preparation for the journey from the church into the dark night after the service, the donning of fur coats, the readying of the pung (or sleigh) are all part of the contrast between the sanctity and safety of the church and the external wilderness, between the candles and lamplight of Christian goodness and the threatening darkness of the unknown wild. The journey itself sets up an increasingly mysterious progress through the forest. While on cleared, stump-strewn country, the product of civilizing settlement processes, all is well but once the "curious inverted dark of the Dorchester woods" (122) is reached, our travelers have entered the primeval forest, have gone beyond the civilizing spaces of the cleared lands and have encroached upon a magical and fantastical realm in the "solemn hush of the great forest" (122). Roberts even reverses light and dark (and the source of light) by describing how the moonlight on white snow illuminates the forest from below, not from above.

- 20 And then the intrepid travellers hear “a bitter long wailing cry, blended with a harshly grating undertone, like the rasping of a saw... just abreast of the pung but deep in the woods” (122) as the panther menaces the laden pung and Old Jerry the horse is urged on faster. As Old Jerry breaks into a gallop, the rector reaches for a large pocket-knife, knowing that this will be no match for the panther but trying to assure Lou that the beast will not attack.
- 21 But while the panther is acknowledged as a creature of the forest, it is described also as “an Indian devil” (123), something which doesn’t follow natural laws of science or reason and instead belongs to the supernatural. This is not the more biologically realistic or even anthropomorphizing view of the panther that Roberts takes in ‘Do seek their meat from God’ (*Harper’s*, 1892), the introduction to *The Kindred of the Wild* (1902 and 1935) and in *The Last Barrier and other stories* (1958). Instead, it is something more sinister and fantastic, something that emerges from the curious inverted dark of the woods. While the rector attempts to rationalize why a real panther would not attack the sleigh, every other piece of evidence refutes this, suggesting that this animal is not following normal expectations. “His pace was a very curious, disjointed india-rubbery spring, which rapidly closed up on the fugitives” (125). With its strange gait, perhaps the panther is no longer animal at all.
- 22 The panther bounds, leaps vast and surprising distances, and appears on the road “not ten paces behind the flying sleigh” (124). Roberts loads his paragraphs with emotive appeal in this part of the narrative : active verbs such as ‘bursts’, ‘grasps’, ‘cowered’, ‘stares’ and vibrant adjectives : ‘amazement’, ‘fresh terror’, ‘ear-splitting screech’ - although this latter is coming from the overblown clarinet which repels the beast and maintains the distance between the sleigh and the threatening phantom : “...as the panther made a dash to intercept the sleigh, it found itself in too close proximity to the strange-voiced phenomenon [Lou’s clarinet] in the pung, and sprang backward with an angry snarl” (126).
- 23 Suddenly the edge of the forest is reached and the travelers emerge into civilization, with the lights of a farm ahead. The panther is no longer a fantastic and supernatural threat. Instead, it is reconceived as realistic animal, a manageable part of the modernist colonizing process and is hunted down and killed with efficient despatch, “after a chase of two or three hours” (126). The story then provides “the country-side all that winter with a theme of conversation ; and about Lou’s clarionet there gathered a halo of romance that drew rousing congregations to the parish church” (126), affirming the civilizing power of Christian faith against the forces of the wild, of rational response against the fantastic and primeval, and of colonial domination of the Canadian physical environment. Richard McConnell’s (1994) adaptation went further and concluded by wishing listeners “a holy and peaceful Christmas, free from panthers and other threats”.
- 24 Lou’s name and gender warrant further attention, from three perspectives. First, Roberts assigns the saving role in the story to this young woman. Lou is the heroine, unusual within a genre of animal stories that tended at the time to have young male protagonists. Indeed, the audience referred to by name in the *Around the Camp-fire* collection is entirely male, the intended enactors of the masculinist and muscular Christianity that would subdue the Canadian wilderness. John Adams notes that the tales in *Around the Camp-fire* were “written as adventure stories for boys” – and yet there is a female hero (Adams, 1986 : 65). Unlike the Romantic treatment of the heroine a decade later by Lucy Maud Montgomery (and Montgomery’s obvious targeting of a young female audience), Roberts

places his heroine in a more physically dangerous position and she emerges as the salvation of the travelling party.

- 25 Second, Lou should be compared to the character Luella Warden in Roberts' novel *The Heart that Knows*, published ten years' later, in terms of the similarity of their names and the saving role and moral purity of heroines in Roberts' work. I argue here that Lou is a prototype character for Luella. Although the setting and plot of *The Heart that Knows* are much more complex, Luella, like Lou, emerges as the keeper of higher moral purpose, even at odds with the views of the community. Instead, it is the male characters that are flawed in the 1906 novel (with the exception of the rector, who appears in both stories). Carrie MacMillan begins this discussion usefully in her Introduction to the 2002 edition of *The Heart that Knows* (MacMillan, 2002: xiv-xvii). In 'Lou's Clarionet' we find an early example of a Canadian heroine who not only saves the day but does so by supporting the moral positioning of muscular Christianity against the fantastic forces of the wilderness.
- 26 Third, the significance of Lou's surname deserves further attention. The Allison family, successful merchants in Sackville, had founded Mount Allison University in 1839. Was Roberts creating a connection to this family's community authority and supporting it in the role Lou plays in saving the day? Similarly, is this a link between the 'good work' of the Allisons and the 'goodness' of Roberts' father – whose middle name ('Goodridge') is played upon as a moral statement in some of his other work, notably *The Heart that Knows*? Roberts is explicit in 'Lou's Clarionet', for example, that the good rector had "forsaken his prosperous congregations at Westcock, Sackville, and Dorchester" (118) in order to make the journey to Second Westcock "through the snows and solitude of the deep Dorchester woods" (118). Certainly, in much of his other work, Roberts uses real contemporary surnames for characters who have positive roles in his stories – and, in Dickensian fashion, assigns fictitious, character-revealing names to negative characters (even if these are only thin disguises for real people). *The Heart that Knows* contains numerous examples, including family names that remain present in the region in 2013. It is reasonable to consider that Roberts was already using this technique in 'Lou's Clarionet' in its 1892 and 1896 versions when applying the Allison name. For the purposes of this article, it suggests also a further blurring of the boundaries between fiction and reality.
- 27 Any elements of the irrational, perhaps even supernatural features assigned to the black panther in this story are significant in that Roberts' animal stories (including many of his other stories involving black panthers) generally take a strongly realist and rational approach, stating clear biological motive and presenting stark physical realities – even to the point of over-anthropomorphizing. In most cases, Roberts' depictions of Canadian animals were heavily influenced by Darwinian views on evolution and species survival (Lucas, 1958). This approach – and its successful incorporation into representations of animals as part of Canadian identity – favours Romantic themes of surviving harsh environmental conditions, of prevailing against the odds, of persevering, just the sort of thing a colonial literature would want to depict and which would prove to be powerful imagery for an emerging sense of the Canadian national psyche. But there is a negative side to this which demonstrates wilderness animals as unknowable, as unpredictable and menacing, going beyond the bounds of scientific understanding of their motives for food and survival. This darker side, expressed in the fantastical depiction of the black panther, needs to be acknowledged also and situated as part of a metropolitan motivation for the creation of a colonial trope of fantasy, wilderness and irrationality – and as a window on our own human condition. Roberts' own quasi-Old Testament admonition at the

beginning of 'Lou's Clarionet' introduces sufficient ambiguity to cause the reader to doubt an entirely realist approach and to consider the blurring of boundaries between real and unreal, between reality and fiction: "Judge ye whether I speak from experience or imagination" (117).

- 28 If there remains any doubt of the enduring legacy of the significance of these blurred boundaries between animal and human and their role in shaping national identity, the continued preoccupation with the eastern cougar (perhaps the black panther of Roberts' stories ?) is further evidence. Every few years, Maritime Canada is galvanized by supposed sightings of this mythical beast (Thurston, 2011 : 89-90). While we may be a long way from the sleigh ride from Second Westcock on a snowy Christmas Eve, we are not that far removed from the conception of the wilderness as a frightening and irrational site. Acknowledging Roberts' use of the fantastic and irrational in 'Lou's Clarionet' provides an important contribution to our current conceptions and practices of Canadian cultural identity.

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ABSTRACTS

Charles G.D. Roberts' 1892/1896 short story 'Lou's Clarionet' focuses on the potential attack by a black panther, a shadowy creature that is at once dangerous and comforting, real and fantastic, disturbing and uncertain. As the rector of the parish guides his sleigh along the road on a snowy Christmas eve, he is shadowed by a panther, which attempts to leap onto the sleigh, bringing the dark forces of the primeval (and prime evil) forest against the good Christian priest. Similar episodes are present in many of Roberts' animal stories, including those focusing specifically on the black panther such as 'Watchers of the Campfire' (1905). By analysing Roberts' use of the menacing, somewhat fantastical presence of the panther in the woods, this paper argues that the fantastic (and dark supernatural) was given a place in the construction of Canadian wilderness and identity alongside the more familiar romantic images of benign nature. Is the panther real or imagined? The anthropomorphizing of wild animals through Roberts' writing, part of a genre of Canadian writing that included the work of Edward Thompson Seton and others, ensured the mystique of the Canadian wilderness, making it at once familiar and fantastic and creating an important and destabilising dichotomy in the construction of a sense of Canadian identity. Roberts' writing, with menacing panther and other animals carrying out Roberts' interpretation of their instinctive actions, foreshadows similar characterizations found in the later work of C.S.

Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien but sets these animal characterizations (both fantastic and realist) within a discourse of national identity construction and the tension between colonial and metropolitan world views.

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