Charles Roberts' Animal Stories

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When critics first started to direct their attention to Charles Roberts' animal stories in the early 1900's, they tended to view the stories in terms of the level of realism that Roberts achieved in portraying animals in their wild environment. Back and forth went the discussions of whether Roberts was describing animals or humans disguised as animals. Roberts himself tried to define the genre he was working in as "psychological romance constructed on a framework of natural science."[1] He disassociated his stories from such works as *Black Beauty* and Kipling's "Mowgli" stories. Roberts also replied directly to the charges of John Burroughs, a crony of Theodore Roosevelt and self appointed Dean of nature writers, who faulted Roberts for assigning human motives to animals. In a prefatory note to *The Watchers of the Trail* Roberts stated:

> The fact is, however, that this fault is one which I have been at particular pains to guard against . . . In my desire to avoid alike the melodramatic, the visionary, and the sentimental, I have studied to keep well within the limits of safe inference. Where I may have seemed to state too confidently the motives underlying the special action of this or that animal, it will usually be found that the action itself is very fully presented; and it will, I think, be further found that the motive which I have here assumed affords the most reasonable, if not the only reasonable, explanation of that action.[2]

However, critics still debated whether or not Roberts was successful in meeting his own criteria.

In 1911, an anonymous writer in the *Edinburgh Review*[3] tried to settle the question once and for all. He was reviewing a number of contemporary books that were classified as animal stories (two books by Roberts were included). He traced the animal story from its historical beginnings and came to the conclusion that what typified the modern, realistic animal story that Roberts was writing was that the animal was the central point of study. He saw the work of Roberts as an "attempt not to humanize but to individualize the animal"(p.118), and considered Roberts to be successful in this attempt. He agreed with Roberts' view that previous fable animals bear little resemblance to the "true" animals in the latter's stories and saw Roberts' detractors as being aware of this difference, but also recognized that "libels disproved retain their vitality"(p.99). The anonymous writer's analysis is extremely thorough and the question of the realism of Roberts' characters would seem to have been answered.

After this initial heyday, critical attention to Roberts' animal stories lessened. However, most of what little criticism there was in the next fifty years tended to continue the original controversy, and dealt with the stories in terms of the realism of Roberts' characters. Finally, when Canadian critics started to evaluate the literature of their past in terms

of its relation to the growth of a truly Canadian literature, Roberts' animal stories began to get more thorough critical attention. However, many of these critics still felt compelled to analyze the level of realism that Roberts achieved and to apologize if they found him lacking. Alec Lucas, in his Introduction to *The Last Barrier and Other Stories*,[4] spends considerable time showing how successful Roberts was in avoiding humanizing his characters. However, in his essay in Klinck's *Literary History of Canada*, "Nature Writers and the Animal Story," Lucas feels the need to mention that Roberts had a tendency "to turn his protagonists into Noble Savages, thus detracting from his work as Natural History"(p.385).[5] Also in the *Literary History of Canada*, Roy Daniells, in a discussion of Roberts' poetry, dismisses the animal stories because, though they "have had the longest popularity . . . they exist in the uncomfortable limbo between deliberate fable and true understanding of animal psychology"(p.402).

Thus the question that the anonymous writer in the *Edinburgh Review* tried to settle in 1911 is still being kept alive. Margaret Atwood, in *Survival*, gets to the heart of this question and answers it, one hopes finally, with a simplicity that previous writers have overlooked. "However, 'realism' in connection with animal stories must always be a somewhat false claim, for the simple reason that animals do not speak a human language; nor do they write stories. It's impossible to get the real inside story, from the horse's mouth so to speak" (pp. 74-5).[6] Thus a writer of animal stories will always project some human qualities into his animals if he wants to try to portray animal behavior from an animal's point of view. However, as Ms. Atwood shows, there is a world of difference between Roberts' animals and those of Kipling or Kenneth Grahame. Roberts is trying to portray animal behavior, and when he sometimes injects a human quality into a character, it is not because he is trying to humanize it but rather because he is attempting to describe how and why an animal behaves in a certain way.

Roberts, of course, was an experienced woodsman and had an intimate knowledge of the wilderness and of the animals that lived in it. This knowledge, together with his interest in the evolutionary discoveries made by Darwin and his followers, is what formed the basis for Roberts' animal stories. He wanted to portray animals in their natural environment as accurately as he could. Since he was familiar with their habits, he had no trouble describing *what* animals did. What made Roberts' work different from that of a naturalist like John Burroughs, however, was that he wanted to also try to show *why* animals behaved the way they did. Roberts accepted the Darwinian notion that the prime force behind animal behavior was the preservation of the species. The basic law of Roberts' wilderness world is the survival of the fittest. Thus the animals in his stories reflect this in their behavior.

In *The Heart of the Ancient Wood* [7] Roberts first presented to his readers, on a large scale, the wilderness world that most of his animal stories were to take place in. In this book Roberts portrays a world that cannot be understood in terms of its appearances. Miranda's mistake is that she not only accepts nature's surface realities, but she also projects her own values onto it. She views the wilderness and its inhabitants the way she wants them to be, not the way they really are. Though Miranda is successful in forcing Kroof, the she-bear, to behave as she wants her

to, in her presence, as soon as Kroof is out of Miranda's sight, she returns to her former ways and kills for her food. It is through another character, Dave, that a realistic vision of nature is presented. As a hunter he partakes in the wilderness struggle for survival. Unlike Miranda, he can see the necessity for animals to kill one another. He can perceive nature's central unity as being partially based on this killing. While Roberts does not primarily focus on the animals in *The Heart of the Ancient Wood*, he has presented a wilderness world in which animals struggle for survival. It is an animal's ability to come to terms with, and to adjust to, this basic law that determines its survival and ultimately the survival of its species.

In "The Animal Story," Roberts' Introduction to *The Kindred of the Wild*, he states that "As far, at least, as the mental intelligence is concerned, the gulf dividing the lowest of the human species from the highest of the animals has in these latter days been reduced to a very narrow psychological fissure"(*KW*, p. 23). I hope to show that Roberts' animal stories represent an attempt to dramatize the infinite possibilities that this statement suggests. In this analysis, I am trying to reveal the motives behind Roberts' stories and, as a result, show that criticism directed at the level of realism Roberts' characters achieve is critical nit-picking and ultimately a waste of time.

In my analysis of Roberts' animal stories, I separate them into three basic thematic types. My criterion for establishing these types has been the degree of human intrusion into the stories. For this principle to be operative and, at the same time, consistent with the definition of an animal story, one must remember Roberts' statement, quoted above, in which he considers the line between humans and animals to be very fine. Thus I am considering, as animal stories, many stories that focus on man in the wilderness. Roberts treats the men (and women) in these stories, however, the same as he does his animal characters. While the human approach to some situations may be more sophisticated than an animal's, the motivation behind basic behavior is the same. Man is striving to survive and it is his superior intelligence that makes him the fittest animal of all.

The first type of story that I will consider is that which depicts animals in the wild, with almost no human intrusion. I say almost because man's unseen presence is sometimes felt in the form of traps, logjams, etc. The focus, however, is totally on the animal and if men do enter the story, they are seen only as one more wilderness hazard. In this type of story Roberts tries to show how his characters respond to various life situations. One of the things that makes Roberts so successful in these stories is his ability to create different situations for his characters. Since he remains faithful to the basic Darwinian axiom of behavior, his characters' prime motivation is survival. Thus every action of his characters, whether it be gathering food, building a nest, mating, or protecting their young, is governed by this rule. With this seeming limitation placed on his work, it would seem that the number of situations Roberts could create would not be very great. However, he is able to work effectively and with variety under this rule. I do not agree with William Magee's statement that, "In effect, Roberts seldom wrote well with any other want for his heroes than food."[8] Roberts works consistently with all his animals' basic wants.

When Roberts is portraying his animal characters, he uses two basic structural techniques. The first involves focusing on an animal or a group of animals and following it, or them, over a period of time. The period of time may vary from an entire life cycle to a matter of hours. In portraying an animal over an extended period of time, Roberts is able to show various responses to different situations. He is also able to show the interrelation of such responses and show how everything goes back to the prime rule of preservation of the species. Three good examples of this structural type which effectively illustrate the range of Roberts' ability are "The King of the Mamozekel," "Queen Bomba of the Honey-Pots," and "The Last Barrier."[9]

In the first story, Roberts traces the life of a moose from his birth through adulthood. The young moose's success depends on combining his instinctual knowledge with the education he receives from his mother. He also learns from more unorthodox sources. While just a calf he happens upon a porcupine, and when he gets a couple of quills stuck in his nose, he quickly learns that porcupines are not to be taken lightly. Another early incident that affects his future behavior is a chance meeting with a bear. With the help of his mother and her mate he escapes the bear, but for the rest of his life he remembers the incident and panics at the mere sight or scent of a bear. These incidents are typical of Roberts' animal portraits. His characters' survival depends on their being able to successfully combine their instincts with learned behavior. Another idea that Roberts emphasizes in this type of story is the cyclical basis of life. Though he focuses on individuals, much of their behavior is predetermined. For example, in "The King of the Momozekel," the mating procedures and the seeking of the moose-yard are performed with almost ritualistic faithfulness. However, in this story it is the memorable character of the "King" that the reader primarily remembers.

In "Queen Bomba of the Honey-Pots," Roberts traces the life of Bomba, a Queen Bee, from birth to death. The survival of the colony governs her every action. At the beginning of the story Bomba is seen just leaving the colony of her birth. She was born just two days earlier and was fed by the Queen Bee herself. When she goes out into the world, she begins her own colony, and at the end of the story it is she who is feeding the future Queens who will carry on after her. When Bomba died "she left behind her a score of royal and fertile daughters, to carry on, when spring should come again, the ancient, fine traditions of her race" (*TWW*, p. 144). In the character of Bomba, Roberts has created the archetypal Queen Bee. Her behavior is entirely instinctual and is governed exclusively by the need to preserve the life of her colony and, ultimately, of her species. Her life has been "predestined to toil"(*TWW*, p.126); as an individual she has no importance. Her individuality has been entirely subjugated to the needs of her colony. Unlike the previous story, where the stress was on the individual moose, in "Bomba" it is on the cyclical basis of life and on the group over the individual.

In "The Last Barrier," Roberts has created a highly individualistic character in the salmon. The story begins with the salmon being only one of thousands of eggs. What gives this salmon his individuality is his ability to survive amidst all the hazards that face a young salmon. While

he is driven entirely by instinctual forces as Bomba was, he must also acquire some learning. Unlike the "King," however, a salmon's mother doesn't stick around to guide her offspring, and more often than not, a salmon gets eaten during the learning process. This young salmon manages to escape all the pitfalls that he encounters. While the character of the salmon is a memorable one because of his handling of the many hazards that he faces, he never once deviates from the instinctual forces that drive him in an endless cycle to the sea and back to the stream of his birth. He is no different from any other salmon that survives as long as he does. And, since the odds are so great against this survival, any salmon that lives this long would face an equal number of comparable situations. Thus Roberts' character becomes "every-salmon" journeying to and from the sea, facing hazards. But, unlike a romantic hero, the salmon's only goal is survival. He cannot deviate from his journey because he is predestined to struggle unchangingly for survival. Joseph Gold views the salmon, at the end of the story, as accepting the inevitability of death.[10] However, the salmon has not given up the struggle for life. It is the salmon's physical strength that fails him, not his desire to survive: "undaunted in spirit though at each effort his strength grew less"(*LB* p.99), he continues to try to get up the falls. It is not until the salmon is physically exhausted that the bear is able to catch him. Even when the bear throws him upon the rocks, the salmon was still "gasping and quivering"(*LB*, p.100). It is only when the bear actually kills the salmon that "unstruggling he was carried to a thicket above the falls"(*LB*, p.100). However, the salmon's death is not tragic. As Gold says, "though individual creatures lose the struggle for survival, life itself persists."[11]

The three examples I have mentioned all illustrate Roberts' attempt to depict animal life over extensive periods of time. Roberts has also written many stories which deal with animals in relatively brief, and usually critical and highly intense, periods of time. In "The Little Tyrant of the Burrows" (*LB*) Roberts focuses on a few short hours of a mole-shrew's life. The reader sees the mole searching and killing for food, avoiding predators, fighting and winning a life-death struggle with a snake, and finally being killed by a fox. In this brief portrait, Roberts has created a highly individualistic character who responds to a number of basic life situations and is finally killed. Roberts is well aware of the difficulty of producing sustained animal biographies. There is just too much repetition in an animal's daily routine. Thus in this story, by focusing on the few short hours before the mole's death, he can accomplish the same end that he does in a sustained narrative, but with much more intensity. The mole has faced typical situations, ones that he might have faced anytime; it was just an ordinary day. His life and death are just part of a typical day in Roberts' wilderness world.

Thus in what may be called animal biographies, whether Roberts gives his readers a sustained view of an animal's life or whether he just focuses on a critical moment, he is doing basically the same thing. He is depicting animals in their natural habitats and showing their responses to various life situations from their point of view. And, whether he's showing the individualistic antics of the "King" or the predetermined life of Bomba, his characters all have one goal, survival.

Roberts approaches the subject of animals in the wild from a situational viewpoint as well as from the viewpoint of individual animals. He either creates a situation that may attract a number of animals to a specific area, or he focuses on a specific area and portrays a number of animals engaged in typical activities in that area. This sort of approach does not really allow any sustained development, since that would involve extensive character development and Roberts is mainly concerned with portraying typical life-death struggles that are common to a situation or area. In "The King of the Floes"(*TWW*) the reader is first introduced to the land itself. It is a harsh, rugged, almost intolerable environment. With the stage now set, a polar bear enters intent on feeding. When he sees the mark of a seal, he quietly waits for the seal to make an appearance. Instead, an entire walrus herd comes onto the floe, a much more formidable foe than the expected seal. The bear does manage to kill a walrus calf which brings confrontation not only with Ah-wook, the leader of the walrus herd, but also with a pair of foxes and a pack of wolves. The bear manages to escape with his prey, and the scene shifts to the sea when the walrus herd leaves the ice flow. Once in the sea the herd is confronted by a huge swordfish which Ah-wook quickly dispatches. While Ah-wook, at the end, is "confirmed in his kingship both by sea and by land"(*TWW* p.71), it is neither his character nor that of the polar bear that dominates the story. It is the Arctic environment itself that the story centers on. This is just another typical day. On another day another group of animals may engage in the same life-death struggles. While the individuals may triumph or die, the environment remains unchanged.

At times, Roberts manages to combine the situational approach with fairly developed characters. "The Keeper of the Watergate"(*WT*) and "In the Moose-Yard"(*TWW*) are good examples. In the former, the character of the muskrat is developed to some extent, but his behavior is examined in terms of how he responds to environmental influences which take on an importance equal to that of his character. In the latter story, a moose family is described in some detail at their winter quarters. But, it is the effect of the harsh winter itself which brings other animals to the scene, including a wolf pack and a bear which attack the moose family. Here, too, the environmental conditions and the behavior of a number of animals are just as important to the understanding of the story as the portrayal of the moose family. One can compare "In the Moose-Yard" with "The King of the Mamozekel" and clearly see the difference in emphasis between them. In the latter the reader is concerned primarily with the development of the "King." He is seen responding to environmental influences, but they are important only to the extent that they help mold his character. In the former story the environmental situation is just as important, and at times more important, than the moose family itself.

All of the above stories, no matter what approach Roberts used, were totally concerned with animals in their wild environment. And, no matter what the immediate stimulus was that caused an animal to behave in a certain way, the basic motivation behind any action was survival. Roberts has not deviated from this fundamental theme in any of these stories. There is another group of stories which, while it keeps the basic theme of survival, really belongs to a different thematic

grouping. I mentioned above that the criterion for determining these groupings has been the degree of human intrusion into the stories. The next type of animal story that I am going to look at deals with animals who are caught between two worlds, the wilderness world and the domestic world of man, and are forced to "choose" between the two.

Margaret Atwood, in *Survival,* distinguishes between American and Canadian "realistic" animal stories by trying to show that the former are usually animal success stories, "success being measured in terms of the animal's adjustment to people"(p.74). She cites London's *White Fang* as an example. She concludes that Canadian animal stories work in just the opposite way. They deal with the death and failure of animals, which become tragic events "because the stories are told from the point of view of the animal"(p.74). This sort of dichotomy may work with the majority of American literature (she mentions Faulkner, Hemingway, and Mailer), however, she neglects to mention London's *The Call of the Wild.* In this book, the dog Buck moves away from domestication towards life in the wild. And, he not only survives in the wild, he becomes the leader of a wolf pack and his offspring blend into the species. I mention this because I feel that Roberts does not comfortably fit this limited, categorical description that Ms. Atwood applies to the Canadian animal story. Roberts has written a number of stories, still from the animal's viewpoint, that deal with animals moving not only from domestication to the wild, but also from the wild to domestication. And, Roberts' characters that exhibit this movement do so in varying degrees of success and failure. In other words there is no consistent pattern as Atwood tries to suggest.

In his "domestic" stories Roberts is still concerned with the motivation behind animal behavior, and his characters are still governed by the law of survival. But the world of man represents another path to achieving survival, and in these stories Roberts is analyzing the difference between the two paths. He shows that no matter how domesticated an animal is, the instinctual forces that guided its remote ancestors are still present and can surface at any time. Roberts, however, is not just content with dealing with this "call of the wild" theme. He also depicts animals in the wild who find themselves, for one reason or another, drawn to man. He is trying to approximate the conditions that led wild animals to become domesticated in the first place. There are also a number of stories that exhibit two-way movement (wild → domestic → wild, and domestic → wild → domestic).

Roberts was interested in these questions early in his career. One of his first animal stories, "Strayed,"[12] dealt with this theme. This is the story of an ox who did not take kindly to the yoke. "The woods appeared to draw him by some spell"(p. 66). He breaks loose and tries to get back to the wild pastures that he roamed in his youth. However, his sole guiding force has been "blind instinct" (p.90) which "absorbed all other thoughts - even, almost, his sense of hunger" (p.71). Even though he initially fights off a panther with some success, the ox has been fatally wounded and the panther eventually catches up to him. However, "No wild beast, but his own desire, had conquered him" (p.74). In this story the domestic animal, while responding to the "call of the wild," was unable to adapt to the wild environment and he dies.

In "The Alien of the Wild," Roberts portrays a domestic animal who is successful in adapting to the wilderness. In this story a young bull, who was forced into the wilderness with his mother, finds himself on his own when she is killed. The young bull learns how to handle himself quite well. He suffers two initial defeats with a bear and a moose. But, as he grows older, "he attacked with fury every bear he saw, and they soon learned to give him a wide berth" (*WT*, p. 99). He is also victorious in a rematch with a bull-moose and seemingly wins a moose-cow. Naturally the bull cannot mate with her and he is forced to wander by himself. The story ends with the bull being killed by a farmer. He is too wild to return to domestication. In "Wild Adoption," Roberts varies this theme a bit. In this story a young bull calf is brought up in the wild by a moose, but though he is successful in surviving, "he was nevertheless an alien to the wilderness, driven by needs and instincts he could not understand" (*TWW*, p. 49). And, like the bull in the previous story, he cannot mate. He too dies at the end, sacrificing himself for his foster-mother.

In "The Passing of the Black Whelps" (*WT*), a wild animal and a domestic animal do mate and produce offspring. In this story the offspring of a wolf and a dog actually attack a man and turn on their own parents. The whelps are wholly wild; the domestic strain in their blood seems to have been wiped out entirely. But they are not all wolf either; they are something unnatural, and the man, the dog, and the wolf all unite to kill them. In the end the wolf returns to the wild, the dog is buried with full honors, and the whelps are left to be skinned. The wolf has been true to his nature, the dog has been faithful to man, but the whelps have been rejected by both the wild and the domestic. The important thing that Roberts is stressing in all these stories is that the instinctual "call of the wild" is present in all domestic animals and can surface at any time, even if only temporarily, as in the case of the dog above.

In "The Homesickness of Kehonka", Roberts traces movement from the wilderness to domestication, in this case forced domestication. Kehonka was one of several wild goose eggs that a farmer had taken and hatched with his domestic geese. Two of the wild geese reach adulthood and, with their wings clipped, find themselves living in domestication. The first goose adapts to this life; he is content with domestication. Kehonka, however, never becomes fully domesticated. He responds to the calls of the migrating wild geese and, when his wings grow back to the point where he can fly a limited distance, he attempts to follow them north. His wings fail him but he keeps on, even when he has to walk. Though "In his heart was the hunger of the quest" (*KW*, pp.139-40), he is killed by a fox. Kehonka has been unable to adjust to domestication but he has also been rendered ineffective for life in the wild. Thus he does not survive.

In "A Gentleman in Feathers", Roberts portrays a wild goose who is able to adapt successfully to domesticated life. Michael, the goose in this story, has been shot down by a farmer. Like Kehonka, he has had his wings clipped. Michael takes to civilization a little better than did the other goose; he even finds a domestic mate, though they do live aloof from the rest of the flock. But when he hears the sound of the migrating geese, he, like Kehonka, responds to their call. Michael's wings fully

grow back and he can join them. However, his mate cannot make so strenuous a journey, and "rather than forsake her he would forget the blue lagoons and the golden reed-beds" (*TWW*, p. 167). In the end Michael rejects life in the wild and returns to the farm and his mate.

"Mishi of Timberline" has a similar theme. Mishi, a panther, has been raised amidst humans since he was a cub. Early in the story Roberts mentions that Mishi functions quite well in this society, "his savage inherited instincts having been lulled to sleep or else never awakened" (*TWW*, p. 8). When an accident occurs, Mishi is forced into the woods and these instincts do awaken, and he functions quite well in the wild. It appears that he, unlike Kehonka, can function on instinct alone. However, Mishi is not content in the wilderness and "chooses" to return to civilization. At the end of the story he accepts civilization in the form of a plate of pancakes. "Mishi devoured them politely, though he would have preferred a chicken" (*TWW*, p. 30). Though the wild animal can function in civilization, his wild instincts are always present.

The story of Mishi actually belongs to another group of stories that exhibit what I have referred to as two-way movement. The animals can function equally well in the wilderness or in the society of man. In "The Freedom of the Black Faced Ram", the "call of the wild" enters a domestic ram who escapes into the wild and functions quite well, though awkwardly, there. He eventually finds a mate and fights off a bear. Finally his former master appears on the scene:

> He had no mind to go again into captivity. But on the other hand, for all his lordliness of spirit, he felt that the man was his master. At first he lowered his head threateningly, as if about to attack; but when the backwoodsman shouted at him there was an authority he could not withstand. (*WT*, p. 21)

In the end the ram follows the man home. In the characters of Mishi and the ram, Roberts has tried to show the effect man has on animal behavior, both short and long range. Mishi, whose acquired skills have been received entirely from man, still retains the basic wants that are common to all panthers. Though he will eat pancakes and accept society, he still would prefer a chicken. The ram, on the other hand, when he finds himself in the wilderness, finds heretofore unknown instincts awakening in him. But the centuries of domestication that are present in his blood are responsible for instincts, just as strong as the wild ones of Mishi, that tell him that man is his master. A character like Kroof, the she-bear in *The Heart of the Ancient Wood*, is another good example of an animal who can function in the world of man or in the wild. However, in the end she turns on man and is true to her own wild nature.

Roberts' main point in all these stories is to get at the ultimate difference between wild and domestic animals. In a story like "Mishi" Roberts shows that though the wild animal can be domesticated, the wild instinct never dies out. In the case of Kroof, it surfaces unexpectedly and the bear turns on man. Conversely, domestic animals can respond to the "call of the wild" but the centuries of domestication in their blood also exert an influence. "The Passing of the Black Whelps" perfectly exemplifies Roberts' feelings. The wolf and the dog unite against their unnatural offspring, but in the end the dog dies for

the man and the wolf returns to the wild. Ultimately Roberts differentiates between domestic and wild animals, though the difference is not so clear at times at the individual level. At the species level, as "The Passing of the Black Whelps" symbolically illustrates, animals are true to their natures. And, the influence of man on animals has been great enough to actually create a domestic nature with its own powerful instinctual drives.

Roberts' third major group of animal stories contains the highest degree of human intrusion of all. In this type of story Roberts actually focuses on man. Man is not just another wilderness hazard, nor is he just a domesticating force. But these stories are still animal stories. Roberts is examining man's behavior in the same fashion as he did that of his animal characters. One must be careful, however, not to include all of Roberts' stories that deal with man in the wilderness in the category of animal stories. *The Heart of the Ancient Wood*, for example, is not an animal story; it is a romance. Though Roberts defined the animal story as "a psychological romance constructed on a framework of natural science" (*KW*, p. 24), *HAW* ultimately represents the more sentimentalized, conventional traditions of romance. Roberts' "human animal" stories, with a few exceptions, are not concerned with human relationships, rather they deal with man in relation to the wilderness. Men are found avoiding predators, hunting, and simply trying to survive in the harsh natural world. In other words, Roberts is depicting humans functioning in the same situations as his animals do. And, just as Roberts was trying to get at the difference between wild and domestic animals, in this group of stories he is trying to analyze what exactly makes man different from animals.

Probably the best place to begin an analysis of Roberts' "human animals" is the novel *In the Morning of Time*.[13] In this book Roberts goes back and takes a look at man in his most primitive state. At the beginning of the novel, the cave men that Roberts depicts are not much different from animals. In Chapter II, a sort of prologue to the book, Roberts recounts what he feels to be the crucial moment in man's development, his first use of intelligence to defeat animals. The "man-creature" defeats two groups of animals by leading them into conflict with each other. Through this action the man realizes his superiority over all other animals and he comes down from the trees. Roberts spends the rest of the novel focusing on a specific tribe of men, and more particularly on the character of Grôm. He follows Grôm as he discovers fire, the bow, the boat, and a number of other important items. Through the archetypal character of Grôm, Roberts clearly illustrates the basic differences between man and animals. Grôm is seen responding to the same behavior situations as animals, but his methods are much more sophisticated, even at this primitive stage. The difference then is in degree rather than kind; man responds differently but is motivated by the same basic needs.

When looking at Roberts' cave men in comparison with some of his more advanced, modern "human animals," one notices that the gap between the two groups is not very great. In the character of Bawr, the leader of Grôm's tribe, Roberts has created an almost Machiavellian figure. Bawr accepts Grôm's discoveries only with the knowledge that

the latter's intelligence poses no threat to his leadership of the tribe. Bawr is not only highly responsive to the needs of his people, he is an astute student of human nature and knows well enough that the key to power lies in concealing information from the people. For example, when Grom discovers fire ("the Bright One"), Bawr tells Grôm "that the service and understanding of the Bright One should not be allowed to the people, but should be kept strictly to ourselves, and to those whom we shall choose to be intimate" (p. 95). And, regarding the right to dissent, Bawr, like a true Machiavel, "cared little whether his followers were content or not, and he took no heed of their ill humor so long as they did not allow it to become articulate" (p. 133). The qualities of the modern political figure have not changed essentially from those of Bawr. By the end of the book, the tribe is seen heading out of the wilderness towards "the shelter of that sweetly wooded and rivulet-watered hill" (p. 311). However, after examining Roberts' stories that focus on modern man, the inheritor of this new world, one can see that, in Roberts' opinion, man is not that far removed from his remote ancestors, and that his primitive instincts can surface very quickly.

The Boy, a figure found in a number of Roberts' stories, is a good example of a character in whom these instincts surface. *The Kindred of the Wild* contains a trilogy of stories structured around this character. The reader first encounters the Boy in "The Moonlight Trails." He seems to be a highly sensitive character. "Animals he loved, and of all cruelty toward them he was fiercely intolerant" (p. 40). The Boy even goes against "Biblical injunction" (p. 41) and defends the snake against human cruelty. However, when Andy, the hired man, suggests they go rabbit snaring, a change comes over the Boy:

> The silent and mysterious winter woods, the shining spaces of the snow marked here and there with strange footprints leading to unknown lairs, the clear glooms, the awe and the sense of unseen presences - these were what came thronging into the boy's mind at Andy's suggestion. All the wonderful possibilities of it! The wild spirit of adventure, the hunting zest of elemental man, stirred in his veins at the idea. Had he seen a rabbit being hurt he would have rushed with indignant pity to the rescue. But the idea of rabbit-snaring, as presented by Andy's exciting words, fired a side of his imagination so remote from pity as to have no communication with it whatever along the nerves of sympathy or association (p. 42).

The instincts of his primitive ancestors have been awakened. To go along with the instincts, the Boy has the ability to recognize and interpret animal tracks, the most primitive sort of reading. When they set the snares, "His tenderness of heart, his enlightened sympathy with the four-footed kindred, much of his civilization, in fact, had vanished for the moment, burnt out in the flame of an instinct handed down to him from his primeval ancestors" (p. 46). At the story's end he repents, not really just for killing the rabbits, but for the cruelty of his actions. He realizes that he has descended to the level of the weasel who seems to kill for no other reason than the sake of killing.

The second part of the trilogy is "The Boy and Hushwing." When we encounter the Boy at the start of the story he is planning to capture an owl. "He might have shot the bird easily, but wanton slaughter was not his object" (p. 167). He is merely trying, "first of all, to test his own woodcraft; and, second, to get the bird under his close observation" (p. 167). He succeeds in capturing the owl by outwitting it. In the end the bird escapes back to the wilderness, but the Boy realizes that that is where the bird belongs.

The final story is "The Haunter of the Pine Gloom." By this time the Boy has become an accomplished woodsman. "He had a pet theory that the human animal was more competent, as a mere animal, than it gets credit of being; and it was his particular pride to outdo the wild creatures at their own games" (p. 202). However, he has still retained his ethical standard and does not kill the animals. Roberts shows that the Boy is not a romantic though. When a lynx family migrates into the area and starts killing his father's stock, the Boy does what is necessary. "His primeval hunting instincts were now aroused, and he was no longer merely the tender-hearted and sympathetic observer. It was only toward the marauding lucifers, however, that his feelings had changed" (pp. 232-3). He eventually kills the lynxes. The trilogy ends on an ironic note, with a lynx hanging dead in the Boy's snare. Underneath the dead lynx a group of rabbits play. This neat twist brings the reader back to the first story, in which the Boy snared rabbits in the same fashion. By the end of the trilogy the Boy has blended his useful primeval instincts with his ethical standard. Thus the rabbits have nothing to fear from him, but the lynxes, who pose a threat to the Boy, are killed.

One can get a better understanding of the Boy's vision by comparing him with Miranda in *The Heart of the Ancient Wood.* Her vision is a romantic one. She does not perceive the life and death struggles that take place in the wilderness. "Her seeing eyes quite failed to see the unceasing tragedy of the stillness" (*HAW*, p. 124). When she finally realizes that her romanticized vision is a false one, rather than accepting nature as it is, she leaves the ancient wood. The Boy, however, has a realistic vision. He can accept nature as it is, and he can function under its laws. Nor does he consider the life and death struggles to be savage. "Even toward that embodied death, the malignant weasel, indeed, the Boy had no antagonism, making allowances as he did for the inherited bloodlust which drove the murderous little animal to defy all the laws of the wild kindred and kill, kill, kill, for the sheer delight of killing" (*KW*, p. 167). This seeming savagery is the basis of the wilderness world. The Boy accepts this and, unlike Miranda, he can still function in the wilderness.

In "The Kill", Roberts portrays a man who, like the Boy, can accept nature's harsh realities. But, unlike the Boy, he accepts them a little too eagerly. He shoots a moose and, "elated and fiercely glad" (*WT*, p. 205), the man surges forward to complete the kill. He stumbles and just as the moose is about to trample him, the animal dies and the man is saved. However, instead of giving thanks for his good fortune, the hunter "sprang up, rushed forward with a shout, and drew his knife across the outstretched [moose's] throat" (*WT*, p. 208). He has sunk to the level of the weasel and kills for pleasure. The Boy has distinguished

between wanton killing (snaring the rabbits) and necessary killing (the lynxes), and thus imposes an ethical standard upon himself. Roberts clearly sees this standard as a basic part of man's nature. When man shirks this standard and descends to the level of the animals, like the man in "The Kill," his error is even greater than the opposite one that Miranda commits.

What Roberts is trying to show in all these "human animal" stories is that although man is motivated by the same wants and needs as animals, he is still different. Man is more than just an animal; further along the evolutionary line, he has moral responsibilities that are equal to, and sometimes take priority over, the mere satisfying of biological drives. A story like "The Truce" clearly illustrates this idea. A woodsman finds himself caught on an ice floe, heading towards a waterfall, with a bear who only moments before was trying to attack him. The woodsman can stoically accept the situation. But, when the opportunity arises, he makes his way ashore. Though he had earlier thought that, perhaps, the bear would find a way out, he realizes "that if he didn't know more than a bear he'd no business in the woods" (*WT*, p. 286). And, not only is he aware of his own superiority over the bear, he also accepts the moral responsibility for the bear's life, and rescues him. This is basically the same conclusion that the Boy reaches. The Boy feels that "the human animal was more competent, as a mere animal, than it gets the credit of being" (*KW*, 202), but he still realizes that he is fundamentally different from "mere animals." The woodsman, though he is a hunter and can regard the wild creatures as his prey at times, can also accept a moral responsibility for the bear's life, something the bear would never have done for him. When Roberts' "human animal" stories are read with these ideas in mind, a fundamental fallacy is perceived in the sort of argument that Desmond Pacey puts forth. Pacey feels that when Roberts "introduces human characters his touch falters and the wildest melodrama occurs."[14] What Pacey considers to be melodrama is usually just man's ethical responsibilities surfacing amidst the wilderness struggle for survival.

In my treatment of Roberts' animal stories, one of my main concerns, and one that I dealt with specifically in the beginning of this article, is that critics have focused on mistaken and irrelevant aspects of Roberts' animal stories. Pacey's above statement is typical of this. Roberts himself talked of the proper function of the animal story:

> The animal story, as we now have it, is a potent emancipator. It frees us for a little while from the world of shop-worn utilities, and from the mean tenement of self of which we do well to grow weary. It helps us to return to nature, without requiring that we at the same time return to barbarism. It leads us back to the old kinship of earth, without asking us to relinquish by way of toll any part of the wisdom of the ages, any fine essential of the 'large result of time' (*KW*, p. 29).

By arranging the stories into three general thematic groups, I have, in a sense, viewed the stories in terms of this statement. Though my specific examples are ones that best exemplify the qualities I have tried to illustrate, all of Roberts' animal stories fall into one of these three groups. They either deal with animals in the wild, apart from man; with

animals in relation to man; or with the "human animal." Joseph Gold has stated that Roberts, through the animal story, was "trying to approach some larger vision of basic human drives and some understanding of the transcendent universal design to which all things contribute."[15] This larger vision can be perceived only when Roberts' animal stories are seen as a unified whole. I have tried to show that one way of perceiving this unity is to view the stories in terms of thematic groupings based on the degree of human intrusion. In each group Roberts is portraying a different aspect of animal behavior, ranging from animals in the wild to "human animals." When viewed as a whole, Roberts' animal stories are revealed to be an attempt to define man's relation to the wilderness and to the animal kingdom.

NOTES

1 "The Animal Story," Introduction to *The Kindred of the Wild* (Boston: Page and Company, 1902), p. 24, hereafter designated as *KW*.

2 Prefatory note to *The Watchers of the Trail* (New York: A. Wessels Company, 1906), p. ix, hereafter *WT*.

3 "The Animal Story," *Edinburgh Review*, CCXIV (July 1911).

4 *Last Barrier and Other Stories* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1958), hereafter *LB*.

5 Carl Klinck, ed., *Literary History of Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965).

6 *Survival* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 1972).

7 *The Heart of the Ancient Wood* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1974).

8 "The Animal Story: A Challenge in Technique," *Dalhousie Review*, XLIV (1964), p. 161.

9 "The King of the Mamozekel," *KW*; "Queen Bomba of the Honey-Pots," *They Who Walk the Wild* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1924), hereafter *TWW*; "The Last Barrier," *LB*.

10 "The Precious Speck of Life," *Canadian Literature*, No. 16. (Autumn 1965), pp. 22-32.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 25.

12 *Earth's Enigmas* (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1969).

[13] *In the Morning of Time* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1922).

[14] *Creative Writing in Canada* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1961), p. 74.

[15] Gold, p. 24.

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