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Throughout the vast realm of short stories, there are many different types of conflict. In some stories, this conflict exists between the characters. In others, there is a more complex structure of conflict that involves not only characters, but also the nature that surrounds the story. Everything in life involves nature to some extent. Despite possessing great amounts of power in language, technology, and society, humans are only able to achieve throughout everyday life what nature permits. If there is conflict between humans and nature, it is impossible for humans to win in the long run. For example, if nature only provides a certain amount of resources for humans to use, there is no point in refusing to learn how to replace those resources with ones that are easy to find (i.e. coal, oil, and other finite resources that humans regularly use). In this anthology of short stories, there is a theme of conflict between nature and mankind. In each story, there is some kind of struggle between the natural order of the world and the order that mankind tries to impose, and in each story, there is an argument about the morality or logic of each conflict.

In each of the stories included in this anthology, there is a friction of conflict between nature and mankind. Although this type of conflict exists in each story, there are subtle differences that set some of the stories apart from others. For example, “The Most Dangerous Game,” by Richard Connell differs the most from the other seven stories because instead of nature inhibiting the abilities of a character in the story, Rainsford, a renowned hunter from New York City, is dropped into the role of the *hunted* and is forced to avoid being killed by the protagonist, General Zaroff. This ironic switching of roles causes the rest of the story to be a critique of the way humans take the “game” of hunting for granted. The following excerpt from “The Most Dangerous Game” demonstrates Rainsford’s bewilderment upon discovering that his host General Zaroff uses the unfortunate people who find themselves on *Ship-Trap Island* as his quarry:

*"I wanted the ideal animal to hunt," explained the general. "So I said, `What are the attributes of an ideal quarry?' And the answer was, of course, `It must have courage, cunning, and, above all, it must be able to reason."'*

*"But no animal can reason," objected Rainsford.*

*"My dear fellow," said the general, "there is one that can."*

*"But you can't mean--" gasped Rainsford.*

*"And why not?"*

*"I can't believe you are serious, General Zaroff. This is a grisly joke."*

*"Why should I not be serious? I am speaking of hunting."*

*"Hunting? Great Guns, General Zaroff, what you speak of is murder."*

The conflict between Zaroff, who represents mankind, and Rainsford, who represents hunted animals, resolves in Rainsford killing Zaroff after sneaking into his house. Zaroff, upon discovering that Rainsford is hiding in his bedroom, says that Rainsford has “won the game,” and therefore declares a victory for the hunted animal, which Rainsford has become. Another story that does not cleanly fit into the cookie-cutter template of *“nature vs man”* conflict is “Shooting An Elephant,” by George Orwell. Conflict between different cultures is something that has plagued the existence of humans throughout the modern era. “Shooting An Elephant” is a story that chronicles a brief segment of Orwell’s time as a colonial officer in the British colony of Lower Burma. The most important conflict, and the one that most clearly addresses the theme of nature’s power over the human race in this story, is the internal conflict that the main character, presumably Orwell himself, experiences as he tasked with killing an elephant that has killed a Burmese man. The man is described as “lying on his belly with arms crucified and head sharply twisted to the side.” Orwell is ordered to kill the elephant, but it is obvious that the animal is harmless.

*But I did not want to shoot the elephant. I watched him beating his bunch of grass against his knees, with that preoccupied grandmotherly air that elephants have. It seemed to me that it would be murder to shoot him.*

The internal conflict comes to play when Orwell is about to shoot the elephant. Imperialism is a force that has historically caused conflict between different cultures, and Orwell makes the argument in this story that imperialism is flawed and leads to chaos. “Shooting An Elephant” ends with Orwell discussing the consequences for shooting the elephant.

*Afterwards, of course, there were endless discussions about the shooting of the elephant. The owner was furious, but he was only an Indian and could do nothing. Besides, legally I had done the right thing, for a mad elephant has to be killed, like a mad dog, if its owner fails to control it.*

The implication of the language used in this excerpt to describe the owner of the elephant is that Orwell believes that colonialism is not beneficial to either the imperialist or the imperialized. In short, imperialism is a worldview that aligns opposite to the natural order of self rule.

In these eight short stories, there are many different types of conflict between specific characters, and there is also conflict between the characters and their natural surroundings and situations. In “Top Man,” by James Ramsey Ullman, and “To Build A Fire,” by Jack London, the argument of the theme is that no matter how hard a man might try to outsmart nature or circumvent its limitations, nature will always win. In “The Old Man and The Sea,” by Ernest Hemingway, although the man fights against the big fish as it pulls him far out into the sea, he is eventually able to kill the fish, the largest he had ever seen in his time as a fisherman. Unfortunately, it takes such a long time to get back to land that sharks eat the entire fish before Santiago arrives back home. This demonstrates the theme that nature always wins against mankind in the long run, even if mankind is able to achieve a temporary victory (i.e. killing the marlin). In “The Short And Happy Life Of Francis Macomber,” also by Ernest Hemingway, there is a simple theme of human inexperience. In this story, Francis is with his wife in Africa on a hunting safari. Francis starts by shooting a lion, but the bullet does not kill the animal. The guide insists that they must follow the animal and finish it off. They follow it, and the guide shoots and kills the lion. Francis then tries to shoot a buffalo, but he only clips its ear. The buffalo charges the group. This story simply displays the strength and resilience of nature, but it also demonstrates the potential stupidity of mankind. In “The Law Of Life,” by Jack London, the plot is defined by “man vs self” conflict. In this story, a man is left for dead by his tribe because he is weak. As he sits in the snow, he begins to have flashbacks about his past, and remembers his dad having to be left in the snow to die, much like himself. One of the flashbacks is that of a moose that had been left by its pack, and was killed by wolves. The fact that Koskoosh was also eventually killed by wolves suggests that mankind and nature are equal. This point is argued by the fact that both Koskoosh and the moose are killed by wolves after being left by their respective groups. Finally, in “Flowers for Algernon,” by Daniel Keyes, there is a clear argument that nature is not to be tampered with by science. Science, despite being a great tool that allows humans to prosper, can lead to unnecessary hardships for people if used incorrectly or irresponsibly.

In these eight short stories, the theme of power regarding conflict between nature and mankind is one that brings about the argument that humans, despite being able to communicate ideas and develop new and more efficient ways of doing things, still rely on nature to support their existence on earth. Without nature, mankind cannot exist.