Rationale Paper - Clay Sullivan

This anthology of short stories was about nature’s role in the everyday conflict of life in modern society. In August of 2013, I moved from the sprawling city of Atlanta to New York. One major difference between these two cities is that in New York City, there is no real area with houses and yards (at least in Manhattan). In Atlanta, there are many neighborhoods within the city limits that look very similar to the stereotypical suburban American town. This creates an atmosphere of nature while giving people access to amenities of downtown areas that are relatively close by. In New York, the only places where nature is able to exist are the two major parks (Riverside Park and Central Park), and maybe in the trees that line many of the streets and avenues that make up the grid of Manhattan. Despite its dense wildlife, Central Park is actually for the most part artificially sculpted. It was designed in the 1860s by a landscape architect, and is the product of topographic sculpting and altering. In a place like New York City, it is important for people to understand the nature that exists in their surroundings, because even though humans are able to greatly reshape their living environments, they are not able to escape from the power of nature that overwhelms even the greatest engineering feats of mankind.

One of the reasons why I created this short story anthology was to convey the idea that nature always holds ‘veto power’ over all life on earth. In the short stories that I selected, there are different angles of conflict that become apparent in the plot. In “The Most Dangerous Game,” I found that the author questioned the practice of hunting for sport. I have personally never agreed with hunting, and have thought it to be cruel. One difference between New York and Georgia is that in Georgia, it is a lot easier (i.e. there are less restrictions) to go hunting. As a result, there are very few deer. I can distinctly remember one night when I was having a lesson at my piano teacher’s house. There were two deer eating the grass in her backyard. Both my piano teacher and I were excited to see the deer, because there are very few deer in the South. They are one of the post popular game in Georgia. In New York, there are very strict laws regarding hunting and gun ownership, and there are a lot more deer as a result. Without people killing creatures of nature, the creatures are able to thrive in their natural environments.

One of the most important themes of this anthology is that nature is something that dictates how people live, and no matter how much people try to keep nature at bay, nature always has the upper hand. In “To Build A Fire,” “Top Man,” and “The Old Man And The Sea,” the protagonists repeatedly attempt to keep nature at bay, but in the end, nature always has the upper hand. In “To Build A Fire,” the protagonist is in the Yukon area of Alaska. He leaves the protection of his group and ends up dying alone in the snow. Quite recently, I rode my bike from my building on the Upper West Side up through the Bronx, and into Yonkers. I thought it would be a fun adventure for me. I made the mistake of relying on my phone for biking directions. Once I got to Van Cortlandt Park, my phone stopped giving me spoken directions, and I got lost in the trails. I was very tired and thirsty, because I had run out of water. Sitting here now, typing this paper, I think that my reliance on technology to help me navigate the many trails of Van Cortlandt Park was a mistake. I should have become familiar with the trails before entering the park. This would have kept me from getting lost. I learned that instead of using obscure trails in the middle of the woods, I should stick to well defined roads when riding in new areas. After this experience, it is clear to me that nature will always have the upper hand. Relying too much on technology to navigate through a wilderness such as the paths of Van Cortlandt Park is not necessarily a completely reliable idea.

I compiled these short stories into this anthology because they all fit the theme of nature being in control of the lives of humans. Although environments like New York City tend to convince people that they are always in charge of their worlds, people do not actually understand how powerless they are until they find themselves in situations like getting stranded in the Yukon, or getting lost without water in the middle of Van Cortlandt Park. Even though I knew the theme that I would be focusing on from the beginning of making the anthology, I did not have the experience of getting personally stranded by a failure of technology to do it’s job. These stories, in addition to my experience with getting lost in the woods of Van Cortlandt Park, have redefined my understanding of people’s place in the natural world. No matter how much we try, nature will always end up having the upper hand.