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*Part I: Creative Writing of Elisée Reclus' "The Story of a Stream" in the style of Georges Perec*

Within the landscapes of European modernity, humanity impolitely imposes itself among the indigenous nature, and the once liberated stream now has found its freedom greedily stolen by the thieves who dwell along the banks. They lay their claim to these waters, exploiting it for personal need, however ruinous these means may be.

This cruel lack of sympathy was typical. Enshrined, constricted, amongst walls that man did not care to build with integrity, just enough to keep the stream wrangled into the configuration suiting their needs best. Limbs of the river diverted, the flow stagnant, and what once rushed full of life, is now full of rubbish.

As the stream advances towards its captor, it squints at the somber eyesore of the industrial landscape. Any purity left in the stream gradually becomes enraptured, drowned by the incessant debris along the shores, further suppressed by the accompanying stench.

Entering the city walls, the stream takes on an involuntary alias. Unrecognizable for what it once was, a pure flowing clear body has devolved to murky waters. No longer proudly rushing, boasting, it now lurks in the alleyways like an ignored townsman. The dark of the night hardly compares to the decay that permeates the water at any time of day. It travels solemnly through the city, wandering with purpose, a purpose donned by others, not quite lost but not quite heading on its preferred journey. The stream has an abyssal semblance, though those who care to voyage to its depths would know that truthfully, its light of life has not yet been extinguished. The once roaring fire may not have found a hearth among humanity, but it did keep its head above water just long enough to obtain a few gasps of oxygen to fuel the flame. It flows along, remaining resilient until its small spark, no brighter than that of a single candle, is met with a lighthouse.

Merging with the sociable river, the stream mingles with it. Testing the waters, grasping for remembrance of how to interact in this free flowing state, and finding that muscle memory helps to gradually depollute itself. Like an old friend, the stream gets wrapped up in the warm greeting of the river, and reigniting an old flame like this helps to neutralize the burden that the stream had taken on through its journey. Purity and pollution become indistinguishable, the currents and the debris come to a reconciliation.

Though a charming reunion, such a confluence does not lead the stream to be completely free of its past. The stream remains an unwilling messenger of decay, cursed with deliverance anywhere it may pass through. The city's pipelines may toss and turn the stream through an entanglement of metal chutes, yet no matter the best efforts of wrangling, the curse is destined to reign over these city waters eternally. With no other option than vengeance, the stream threatens to taint anything in its path, continuing through all the crevices of the city, sustaining the fate that the humans brought upon their own waters.

The city is stained. This stream of waste cycles back what once was hoped to be seamlessly washed away. Foulness reeks, distributed, redistributed waste of what once was pushed down the stream's throat, now is heartlessly regurgitated, as the stream struggles with its own vitality and decay though is regretful of its inevitable demise brought upon those thieves who dwell on the banks.

Do you know what happens when clay is left out, unwrapped? It will dry out, and once dry, it cannot be rehydrated. Clay in human hands, European civilization has sculpted the stream with negligence. The dents, and the scrapes, and the folds, and the coiling, and the scoring, and the pinching. Overworked, then tossed aside. The stream's true purpose couldn't possibly be more overlooked.

On some days, in the concrete heart of the city, a pulse is still present. The upbringing of urban youth bears a familiar childhood to the stream, born into the filth that comes from the hands of those before them. But to these ingenuous young minds, polluted streams look like stormy waters laden with pirates, dragon-infested moats protecting a castle, a magical portal to a wizarding world. The rare acknowledgement bears a bittersweet sentiment to the stream, happy to be seen, though sad to be seen in this state.

Generational rubbish is to be seen by the stream. A silent observer, a disapproving spectator, a helpless accomplice, yet omnipresent. However poor the above ground state, the stream takes solace in

knowing in time, these labyrinths will connect to what once was. Towards the river, the fresh taste of pure currents is overpowering, foreign after so long, the stream almost has the urge to spit it back out. Not to worry, clarity is found. Nature's alchemy has a way of symbiosis. A picture of renaissance, pollutants are sloughed away, the burdened flow gradually able to regain the spryness of its youth.

Tomorrow will always come, designated by the rise and fall of the sun. Nature's self-imposed assurance for vitality. As the city is greeted with each tomorrow, nature forges the cyclical renaissance of its waters. A bold reentrance, the stream arrives home after overstaying its welcome in the city. Welcome back with open arms, as it is cleansed, glimmering with hope of nature's potential for resilience amidst the modernity of these thankless industrial landscapes (Perec), (Reclus).

*Part II: Analytical Artist Statement of the Progression of France's Environmental Justice Movement*

Through my creative reinterpretation of Elisé Reclus' "The Story of a Stream" in the style of Georges Perec, my objective is to expand upon the themes of historical environmental justice and how changing priorities have contributed to the making of contemporary France, with a focus on Paris. Reclus and Perec have similar styles, as they both demonstrate meticulous attention to detail. In Reclus' "The Story of a Stream", the flowing nature of the river parallels the flowing "stream of consciousness" nature of Perec's writing. Working with the text, once translated linguistically from French to English and now translated stylistically from Reclus to Perec, my aim was to manipulate the context while preserving the content. The purpose of retelling the same story through a different voice in this creative writing piece was to bring forth the central messages more clearly. The emergent message was how anthropogenic influence has a harmful impact on nature, and in a karma-like fashion, the degraded environment is harmful to vulnerable populations coexisting with it. What remained after this rewriting from Reclus to Perec was the strong, emotive descriptors used to convey a negative attitude towards the industrialization and urbanization of Metropolitan France. Though this disdain for modernity is unwavering, by the end of the writing Reclus comes to a reasonable conclusion that some amount of technical progressions are necessary in order to also progress social justice.

This points to how Reclus tried to call attention and alert the public through his writing, in a way that usually falls to the responsibility of scientists or politicians. Reclus was ahead of his time in bringing attention to environmental injustices that are tied to social outcomes, which often go ignored, both intentionally and unintentionally. Environmental justice has historically received little to no acknowledgement within France. There has been a consistent gap in recognizing the connection between social injustice and environmental issues in both public discourse and policy making. Only as recently as the past 15 years has there been an increase in environmental justice research (Coolsaet, 2). Given that Reclus' writing was published in 1869, this makes the case that anecdotal and fictional writing can inspire awareness where there is a gap in empirical, scientific data or political support.

The context of when Elisee Reclus' wrote this story was the establishment of the Commune, in which he was an active participant and his personal philosophy aligned strongly with the Communard ideals of liberty and ending oppression of the lower class. In his writing "The Story of a Stream" he works to exemplify lessons of environmental justice in the depiction of the populations affected and most vulnerable to the polluted river water, such as the innocent children who play in the filth.

The interaction between Paris and the Seine river during the industrial era, 1790 to 1970, was characterized by rapid population growth, technological advancements, and changing priorities on environmental issues. While Reclus makes known his contempt for the "debris" that pollutes the stream, from 1790 to 1850 excrement waste was treated as a profitable commodity, not purely as rubbish. There were sustainability efforts in the form of capitalistic desires to use this waste for agricultural purposes, and thus it was diverted from the river (Fabien, 13). Strong prioritization for agriculture also led to the idea of sewage-irrigated farming, though it was determined to be too expensive. However, in the 1920s, the localized water supply had become prevalent and created a shift away from relying on the river as an urban water source (Barles, 23). This, in addition to the declining value of excrement as modern fertilizers came to the market, led to increased pollution of the Seine River, which was further compounded by other pollution sources resulting from increased industrial processes. The transitional viewpoint of waste as a resource versus as a pollutant demonstrates how changing priorities within France contributed to the improvement of urban water hygiene, while simultaneously contributing to river degradation. While Reclus aimed to call out environmental injustices like this early on, technological advancement continuously took priority. The modernization of the water and sewage system were instrumental to the transformation of Paris and its current urbanization (Gandy, 10). Now in the 21st century, with Paris solidified as an epicenter of international power, there has finally been space and priority given to addressing these environmental injustices. Though for Reclus, it would have been preferred for these efforts to have been preventative rather than retroactive reparations. There is a current effort, costing over \$1 billion dollars, to clean up the Seine (Walt and Feferberg). In order to prevent sewage from being pushed into the Seine, a massive underground rainwater storage tank is being engineered to prevent runoff from contaminating the river. Reclus likely

would have scoffed at this, seeing how his warnings were unheeded. Hosting the Olympics in Paris this summer 2024 created the need for “swimmable” water in the Seine. This current initiative reemphasizes how shifts in France’s social priorities have indirectly contributed to environmental justice efforts, a cyclical activism likely to continue in the future, similar to the continuous renewal of a stream.

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