

Paris Weeps as Notre Dame Burns

by Nidra Poller



April 15th, President Macron was scheduled to address the nation at 8 PM, to present a sort of executive summary of government policy, revised but not diverted by five months of weekly Gilet Jaune actions. I switched on the television 10 minutes before the hour, expecting to hear the usual quibbling: The Gilets Jaunes expect nothing and won't be satisfied until the president resigns. What a surprise. Commentators, specialists, journalists and the man in the street don't think any real problem will be really solved. That's a safe bet. They will all, who knows why, entertain the confusion between the Gilets Jaunes, boiled down to some thirty thousand seditionists, and French voters that may or may not have joined in the great national debate. President

Macron does not have to satisfy the Gilets Jaunes. We live in a democracy, not a tyranny of turbulent minorities.

I turn on the television.

No, it's not the panel waiting to pounce on the president.

It's Notre Dame in flames.

You don't have to be Catholic, Christian, or a lover of cathedral architecture. You don't have to be Parisian, French, or a citizen of the western world. Raging flames devouring Notre Dame can bring tears to your eyes. It is universally heartbreaking.

Here in Paris, awestruck pedestrians stopped in their tracks. Gaped. Prayed. Exclaimed. Sobbed. Watched in disbelief as the sky-high inferno defied our will and determination. On the doorstep of Holy Week, Notre Dame was going up in flames and it looked like nothing could stop it. Do leaden roof tiles burn and melt, do stones go white hot and lose their grip, will we watch, helpless, as fire consumes the entire edifice, leaving a gaping black hole in the heart of Paris?

Is it terrorism? No one knows. It is absolutely terrifying. What if nothing could stop the blaze? It could spread across the Ile St. Louis, swallowing up mansions and touristy restaurants, leveling expensive hotels and sizzling a dozen Berthillon ice cream parlors.

Time stands still, the 19th century Viollet-le-Duc spire fills to bursting with red hot flames, dense turbulent multi-color smoke billows and roars. It seems like nothing can get on top of the fire. No ladder can reach that high. President Trump slaps us with a scorching tweet: Bring on the water bombardiers! Commentators, originally brought in to haggle over President Macron's speech, mumble and stutter. Hmm, maybe the Canadairs are too far south? I can hear my American friends snickering. "Those stupid French don't even know how

to extinguish cathedral fires.” It takes a while before we learn that a cathedral is not a forest, even when the roof beams are made of hoary oak. You can’t bombard Notre Dame with tons of water. The walls would come tumbling down.

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