

# Apologies made to the Masters

Olivier Marboeuf, December 27<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Prolific academics of the firmest rigor, mind-boggling thinkers, renowned intellectuals, writers and journalists for the best of the French press, you the finest among us, beyond reproach and yet humble, dear masters and mistresses whose leniency we admire, you who know when to give us a stern slap whenever necessary to show us your friendship, camaraderie and also the path to follow if we become lost in somber thoughts; here, in the name of all those who have offended you, I humbly place at your so elegantly shod feet, our flat and yet vibrant apologies.

I became lost in the way a youth does when he tastes the first pleasures of intoxication at a carnival. What needed to be decolonized that hadn't already been dealt with (and in such a beautiful way)? Why the sudden haste to darken the portrait of France, showing it as an ominous empire of yesterday and today, there where the brightest lights of democracy shine with all their fire?

What came over us so that we suddenly believed ourselves authorized to occupy libraries and conferences without your permission? To lurk at the edges of seminars and read slave literature, sorcerers' literature? What evil spirit possessed us and set us to writing without a thought for science? Quickly we became lost; this was only to be expected. Hadn't we underestimated the difficult task of thinking, the weight of which curves your backs each and every day and smothers with despicable howls a History written with such grandeur? You who have measured the soul of each one of us, who have felt in your flesh righteous suffering, you who have given to all the taste for effort and recompense—surely you must feel betrayed!

Deceived by those on the left and tainted by ugly bitterness, egoists and ingrates knock on the doors of the University, bringing with them gangrene and doubt. I know this has eaten away at you, I see you afflicted. I do not have hands enough to wipe all your foreheads. Here, young girls let fall beautiful novels and books of poetry to write manifestos and demand the skin of the Masters. There, vigils foment plots and raise their voices to speak, servants join together with rebellious young men. This is the sad assembly I have seen with my own eyes! And there is no cudgel, other than yours, to redress these false truths which agitate and confuse a populace forgetful of your goodness.

In the streets I read your magnificent public statements and I can assure you I saw people cry. And there were others who cheered for the return of free speech, for the rights of groping hands and for an elegant science that would trample on indigenous blarney. Populations who were naked only yesterday, before you pulled them with all your strength out of the glacial obscurity of ignorance, tribes whose thirst was quenched by your vigor; today they cry out “rape” and “reparations”. I was one of them for a time. I became lost in the ardent forests, at the edge of cities where, in the deepest secrecy, so many speeches of revolt are written. The Blacks imagine themselves as both prophets and terrorists. But all this is only a smokescreen, only cheap magic. As I have, they will one day see the light. And soon they will rediscover the route back to the plantation. Eyes downcast, they will take up their tasks again, when they’re not asking you for advice and even for recommendations so they can be accepted into respectable institutions. On my route back, in the night illuminated by burning cars, I crossed paths with Vanneste<sup>1</sup> with his horror-film face, bedraggled as if he’d caroused all night; I reassured him. I took him in my arms and spoke to him using words I’d learned from you. He smiled like a happy child.

Please know: what you give us every day is priceless and each one of your words is music that re-invigorates us. I came here to interrupt this holiday feast to beg you not to falter in your work, to have no doubts regardless of the size of the hordes and to continue to illuminate us with your lights, which trace a path towards our greater humanity. Write, write until you are heard and until the evil decolonial fable is reduced to the utter silence it deserves.

Your servant who hopes also to be your friend.

**Translated from French by Liz Young.**

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<sup>1</sup> Christian Vanneste is a French parliamentarian. In June 2004, he presented a subamendment to the