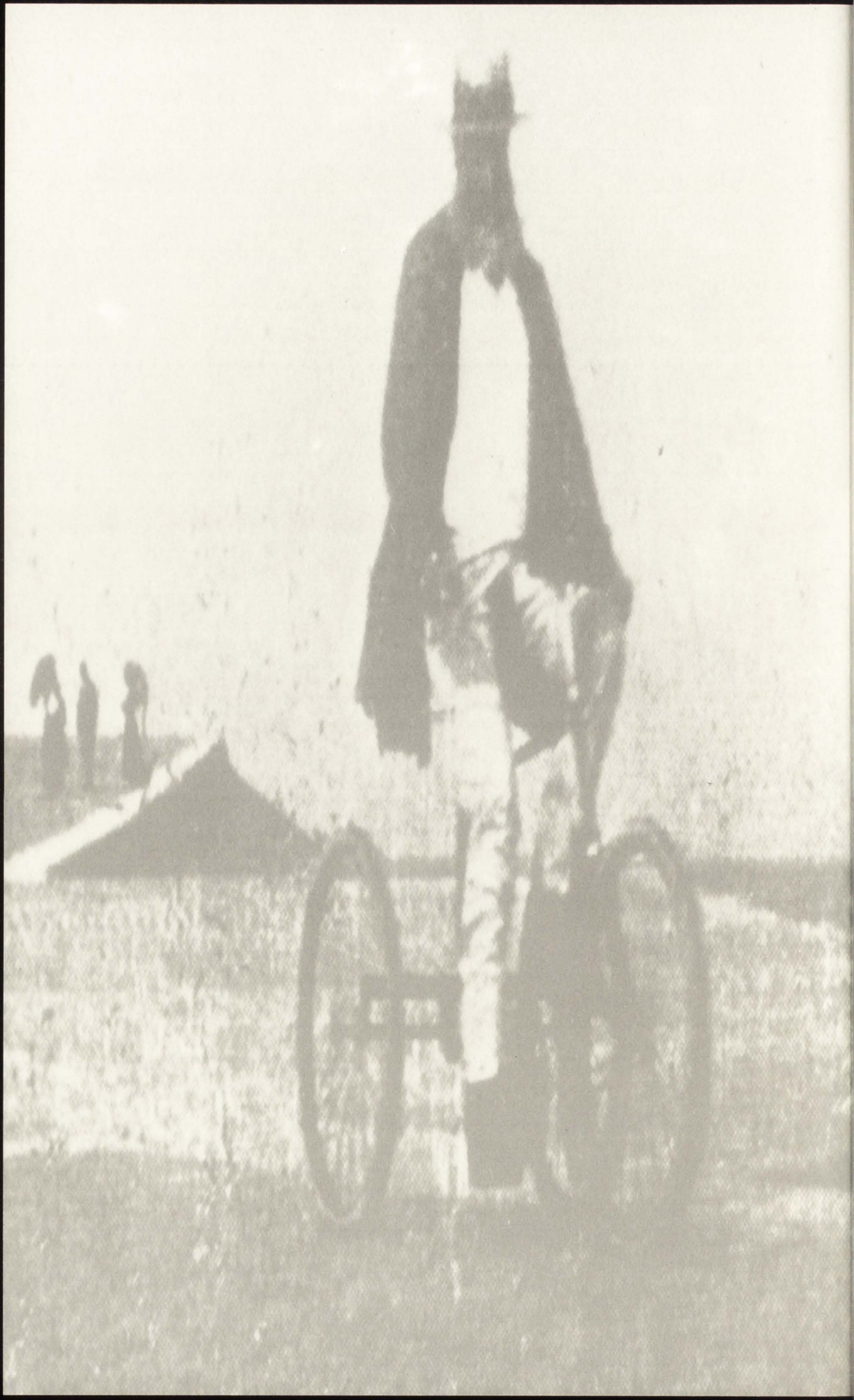


**RED
RUBBER**



RED RUBBER

gekomponeerd door / composed by / composé par

DIRK D'HAESE

libretto door / libretto by / livret de

ALEXANDER STEYERMARK

in opdracht van / commissioned by / commandé par vzw S.O.I.L.

Een S.O.I.L. produktie
in coproductie met deSingel
en Antwerpen Culturele Hoofdstad van Europa 1993
en met de medewerking van de Munt.

A S.O.I.L. production
in coproduction with deSingel and Antwerp Cultural Capital of Europe 1993
and with the collaboration of la Monnaie.

Une production de S.O.I.L.
en coproduction avec deSingel
et Anvers Capitale Culturelle de l'Europe 1993
et avec la collaboration de la Monnaie.

RED RUBBER

Gekomponeerd door - Composed by - Composé par Dirk D'Haese
Libretto door - Libretto by - Livret de Alexander Steyermark

WERELDPREMIERE / WORLD PREMIERE / PREMIERE MONDIALE
7 MEI 1993

Regie - Direction - Mise en scène	Alexander Steyermark
Muzikale leiding - Musical direction	
Direction musicale	Robert Casteels
Dekor - Set - Décors	Yoris Van den Houte
Kostuums - Costumes - Costumes	Anita Evenepoel
Belichting - Lighting - Eclairage	Chris Renson
Grime - Make up - Maquillage	Ad Van Mierlo

Arthur Hodister	Werner Van Mechelen
Enkofo	Thomas Young
Fiona Birkin	Virginia Kerr
Harris Birkin	Zeger Vandersteene
Nzinga	Herbert Perry
Victor LeBlanc	Wilbur Pauley
Lontulu	Denise Alonzo

Henchman 1	Gary Boyce
Henchman 2	Marcel Snijders
Efomi	Keel Watson
Mboyoy	Colin L. Brown

Villagers	Collette Allen
	Josephine Amankwah
	Angela Caesar
	Michelle Lokey
	Ademilola Oduwale
	Antonia Adellita
	Llewellyn A. Rayappen
	Steven Denton
	Keel Watson
	Colin L. Brown
	Marcel Snijders
	Gary Boyce

Orkest - Orchestra - Orchestre Sounds Of an Ignored Landscape

De wereld moet blijvend een geweten geschopt worden. Soms vindt de geschiedenis hierbij de steun in de wereld van de kunst. Zo evoceert de opera *Red Rubber* op indringende en poëtische wijze de periode van Kongo Vrijstaat (1885-1908) onder de Vorst-Soeverein Leopold II.

Deze opera heeft echter een universele dimensie en klaagt alle wantoestanden van om het even welke kolonisatie aan. En misbruiken waren er in Kongo Vrijstaat zeker! Leopold II regeerde er als een absoluut monarch. De economische structuur zelf bracht vele misbruiken mee. Bijna heel Kongo was staatsdomein zonder vrije handel. De staat exploiteerde zelf zijn domeinen of liet dit doen door consessiemaatschappijen zoals de "Abir" en de "Anversoise" (in het Mongalabekken) met de staat als hoofdaandeelhouder. Zijn eigen zogeheten Kroondomein bracht Leopold II, vooral uit de gedwongen rubberoogst, 7 miljard huidige Belgische frank netto op.

De staatsinkomsten van Kongo Vrijstaat waren hoofdzakelijk verzekerd door roofbouw : eerst ivoor en vanaf het einde van de jaren negentig vooral rubber. Om aan een voldoende opbrengst te komen, stimuleerden de maatschappijen en ook de staat zelf hun agenten met premies per kilo ivoor en rubber en zelfs met bevorderingen. Een dergelijk systeem droeg er natuurlijk toe bij dat rubber oogsten dwangarbeid werd. Bij onvoldoende opbrengst liet men vanaf 1893 tot minstens 1897 dorpelingen doodschieten; hun rechterhand werd afgehakt en gerookt en als bewijs naar de blanke verantwoordelijken van de Evenaarsprovincie gebracht. Later werden duizenden vrouwen gegijzeld tot hun mannen voldoende rubber brachten. Velen werden letterlijk uitgehongerd. De ongeveer twee decennia durende, ononderbroken rubberjacht zorgde ervoor dat rubber in de groene hel van het evenaarswoud rood geworden was door het bloed van de ontelbare slachtoffers. Jan Vansina, Vilas Research Professor te Wisconsin, schrijft : "Omvangrijke verwoestingen, hongersnood ten gevolge daarvan en van dwangarbeid en uitdrijving, te zamen met het ongewild invoeren van pokken en slaapziekte als nieuwe ziekten, hebben tussen 1880 en 1920 de bevolking van de kolonie waarschijnlijk op zijn minst met de helft verminderd" (1).

Klachten van protestantse zendelingen zetten de Ier Roger Casement, Brits consul te Boma, ertoe aan een onderzoek te starten. Zijn rapport en de oprichting, samen met de journalist E. D. Morel, van de Congo Reform Association bracht de Kongo-kwestie in de belangstelling. Onder internationale druk moest Leopold II in 1908 zijn Kongo, Kroondomein inbegrepen, aan België afstaan.

Antwerpen speelde in dit alles een belangrijke rol. Zijn haven was belangrijk voor de import van ivoor en rubber en de Antwerpse beurs noteerde de aandelen van o.a. de "Anversoise". De Antwerpse financier Alexandre de Browne de Tiège was president van deze maatschappij, die tevens haar zetel te Antwerpen had. Hij was ook administrateur van de "Abir". Beide maatschappijen werden in 1906 gedeeltelijk van hun rechten vervallen verklaard wegens zeer erge misbruiken op de inlanders.

Dr. D. Vangroenweghe,
Cultureel Antropoloog

(1) In het Woord Vooraf, p. 8 van Daniel Vangroenweghe, *Rood Rubber. Leopold II en zijn Kongo*. Elsevier, 1985. Vertaald onder de titel : *Du Sang sur les lianes. Léopold II et son Congo*. Didier Hatier, 1986.

The world must continuously have its conscience aroused. To do this, history sometimes finds support in the world of art. Thus, the opera *Red Rubber* evokes penetratingly and poetically the period of the Congo Free State (1885-1908) under King Leopold II.

This opera, however, has a universal dimension and indicts all abuses by whatever form of colonialism. And abuses there certainly were in the Congo Free State! Leopold II ruled there as an absolute monarch. Inherent in the economic structure itself were many abuses. Almost the entire Congo was the domain of the State without free trade. The State itself exploited its domains or had it done by concession companies like "Abir" and "Anversoise" (in the Mongala bassin) with the State as the chief shareholder. His own so-called Crown Domain brought Leopold II, particularly from the forced rubber harvest, 7 billion current Belgian francs net return.

The State incomes from the Congo Free State derived primarily from excessive exploitation : first ivory and, from end of the 1890's on, primarily rubber. In order to obtain sufficient production, the companies and also the State itself encouraged their agents with premiums per kilogram of ivory and rubber and even with promotions. Such a system, of course, contributed to the harvesting of rubber becoming forced labor. If the yields were insufficient, villagers were shot from 1893 on until at least 1897; right hands were chopped off, smoked and brought as proof to the white supervisors of the Equatorial Province. Later thousands of women were taken hostage until their husbands brought in sufficient rubber. Many were literally starved. The approximately two decades of uninterrupted hunt for rubber caused rubber, in the green hell of the equatorial jungle, to become red with the blood of innumerable victims. Jan Vansina, Vilas Research Professor at Wisconsin wrote that extensive destruction, and the famine resulting from it and from forced labor and expulsion, together with the unintentional importation of smallpox and sleeping sickness as new diseases reduced the population of the colony between 1880 and 1920 probably by at least a half (1).

Complaints by Protestant missionaries led the Irishman Roger Casement, British consul in Boma, to launch an investigation. His report and the foundation, together with the journalist E. D. Morel, of the Congo Reform Association, brought the Congo question to the force. Under international pressure, Leopold II had to relinquish his Congo, the Crown Domain included, to Belgium in 1908.

Antwerp played an important role in all of this. Its harbor was important for the import of ivory and rubber, and the Antwerp stock exchange listed the shares of companies like "Anversoise". The Antwerp financier Alexandre de Browne de Tiège was president of this company, which also had its headquarters in Antwerp. He was also the administrator of "Abir". Charles de Wael, son of an Antwerp alderman, was director of "Abir". In 1906, both companies were declared to have partially forfeited their rights because of very serious abuse of the natives.

Dr. D. Vangroenweghe,
Cultural Anthropologist

Translation : Edward Haasl

(1) In the Preface, p. 8, of Daniel Vangroenweghe, *Rood Rubber. Leopold II en zijn Kongo*. Elsevier, 1985. Translated into French under the title : *Du Sang sur les lianes. Léopold II et son Congo*. Didier Hatier, 1986.

Pour réveiller les consciences, il faut battre les gens. Parfois, c'est le monde de l'art qui donne un coup de main à l'histoire. L'opéra *Red Rubber* par exemple, porte un regard à la fois pénétrant et poétique sur l'époque de l'Etat indépendant du Congo (1885-1908), dont le Roi Léopold II était le souverain à titre personnel.

Cet opéra a une dimension universelle car il condamne tous les abus perpétrés par toutes les nations colonisatrices. Dans l'Etat indépendant du Congo, les abus ne manquaient certes pas! Léopold II y régnait en monarque absolu. La structure économique se prêtait à de nombreux abus. Pratiquement tout le territoire du Congo était une seule propriété d'état sans commerce libre. L'état exploitait lui-même ses domaines ou en confiait l'exploitation à des sociétés concessionnaires, telles que "l'Abir" ou "l'Anversoise" (dans le bassin du Mongola), dont il était le principal actionnaire. Léopold II y possédait un domaine privé, ce qu'on appelle le domaine de la Couronne, qui lui rapporta - essentiellement par la récolte forcée du caoutchouc - l'équivalent de 7 milliards de francs belges de notre époque nets.

Les caisses de l'Etat indépendant du Congo étaient alimentées essentiellement par le produit de l'exploitation à outrance : celle de l'ivoire dans un premier temps et ensuite, vers la fin des années quatre-vingt dix, du caoutchouc principalement. Pour s'assurer une production suffisante, les sociétés concessionnaires et l'état même stimulaient leurs agents en leur offrant des primes par kilo d'ivoire ou de caoutchouc récolté ou en leur proposant même des promotions. Ce système contribua naturellement à faire de la récolte du caoutchouc de véritables travaux forcés. A partir de 1893 et certainement jusqu'en 1897, les villageois qui récoltaient trop peu furent fusillés. On tranchait la main droite du cadavre, on la fumait et on la présentait en guise de preuve aux responsables blancs de la province de l'Equateur. Plus tard, ce furent des milliers de femmes que l'on prit en otage jusqu'à ce que leurs époux récoltent une quantité suffisante de caoutchouc. Affamer les gens constituait une autre tactique. Cette incessante chasse au caoutchouc, qui a duré près de deux décennies, a fait en sorte que dans l'enfer vert de la forêt équatoriale, le caoutchouc a viré au rouge par le sang des innombrables victimes. Jan Vansina, Vilas Research Professor au Wisconsin, écrit qu'en raison des énormes dévastations et de la famine qui en fut la conséquence, des travaux forcés et des expulsions, de l'importation involontaire de nouvelles maladies telles que la variole et la maladie du sommeil, la population autochtone de la colonie a vraisemblablement diminué de la moitié au moins entre 1880 et 1920 (1).

Des missionnaires protestants se plaignirent et incitèrent le consul britannique en poste à Boma, l'Irlandais Roger Casement, à ouvrir une enquête. Le rapport qu'il rédigea et la création, avec l'aide du journaliste E. D. Morel, de la 'Congo Reform Association' propulsèrent la question congolaise au centre de l'actualité. Les pressions internationales étaient telles que Léopold II se vit obligé de céder son Congo, y compris le domaine de la Couronne, à l'état belge en 1908.

Anvers joua à cette époque un rôle de premier plan. Son port était en effet important pour l'importation d'ivoire et de caoutchouc, et la bourse d'Anvers cotait les actions de "l'Anversoise" entre autres. Le financier anversois, Alexandre de Browne de Tiège, présidait cette compagnie, dont le siège était d'ailleurs établi à Anvers. Il était également l'un des administrateurs de "l'Abir". Charles de Wael, le fils d'un échevin anversois, devint le directeur de "l'Abir". En 1906, les deux compagnies furent partiellement déchues de leurs droits en raison des sévices exercés sur les autochtones.

Dr. Daniel Vangroenweghe,
Professeur d'Anthropologie Culturelle

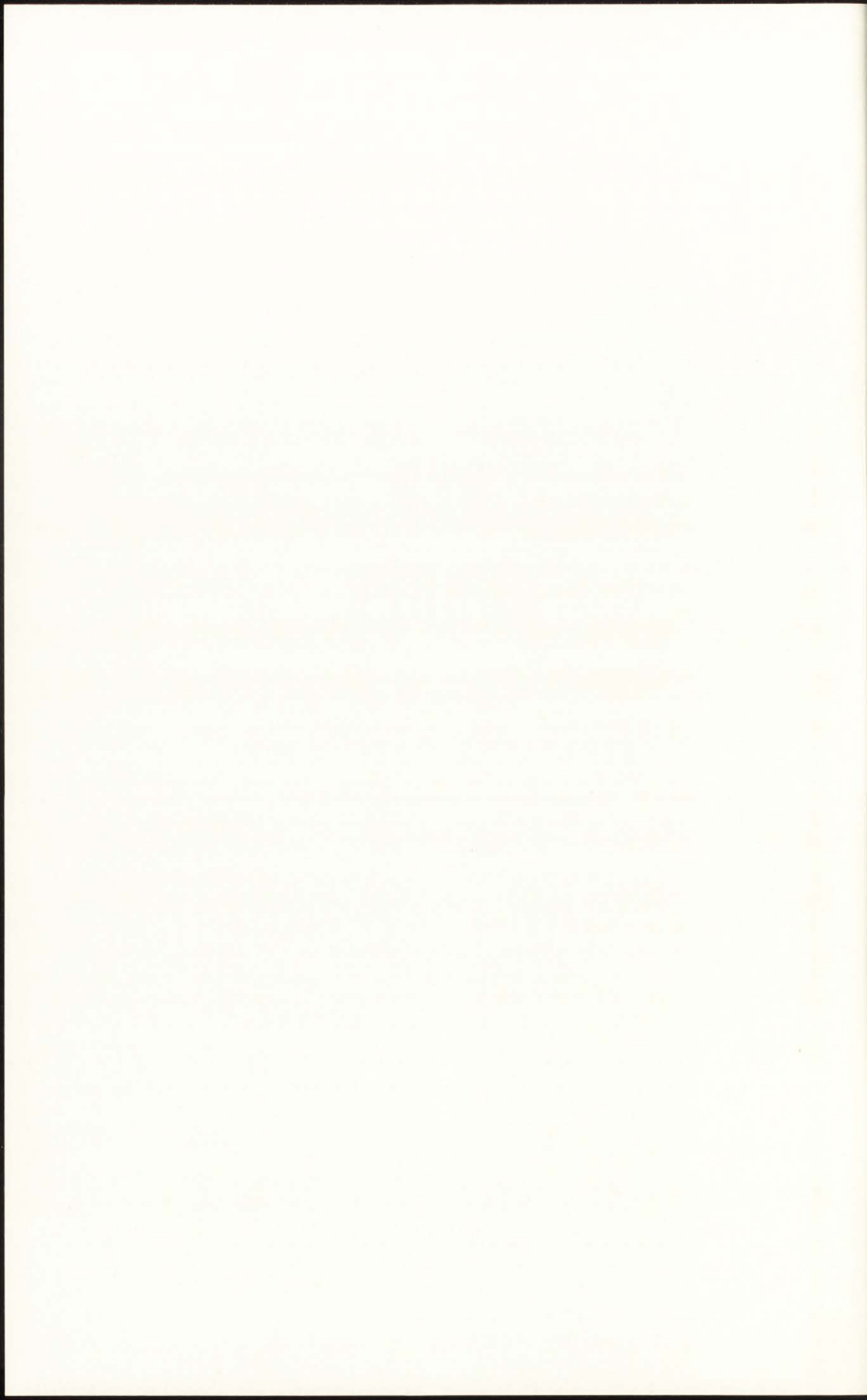
Traduction : Yannik Alexandre

(1) dans la Préface, p. 8 de D. Vangroenweghe, *Rood Rubber. Leopold II en zijn Kongo*. Elsevier, 1985. A paru en français sous le titre : *Du sang sur les lianes. Léopold II et son Congo*. Didier Hatier, 1986.

RED RUBBER

LIBRETTO BY

ALEXANDER STEYERMARK



RED RUBBER

Characters:

Arthur Hodister (Flemish) — [Baritone]: white agent for ABIR (Anglo-Belgian India Rubber Company); late-thirties/early-forties; trying to make a name for himself; could be a decent man in another time in another place, but this might not be the time, this might not be the place.

Harris Birkin (American) — [Tenor]: Protestant missionary; mid-forties; large; energetic; for him the whole world is fertile ground for sowing the Word of the Lord.

Fiona Birkin (American) — [Soprano]: Harris' wife; mid-thirties; an amateur photographer; well-meaning; loves her husband.

Enkofo — [Tenor]: squad captain of black soldiers of the Congo Free State; mid-thirties; cunning; ruthless; knows a good opportunity when he sees it.

Victor LeBlanc (Walloon) — [Baritone]: district commissioner in the Congo Free State; late-forties; an unscrupulous bureaucrat; devoted to an impossible dream.

Nzinga — [Bass Baritone]: chief of Lulonga; late-forties; strong; dignified; his world is slipping away.

Lontulu — [Boy Soprano]: son of Nzinga; 12 yrs old.

Enkofo's two Henchmen — buffo characters; can be taken from chorus.

Efomi & Mboyo — villagers; can be taken from chorus.

Villagers of Lulonga — [Chorus]

The story takes place in Lulonga, a village in the Congo Free State. The twentieth century will soon begin.

Leopold II is king of Belgium.

ACT I

SINFONIA 1

Scene 1:

The veranda of Hodister's house in Lulonga.

HODISTER is busily at work stuffing a large dead bird, which lies sprawled out next to various tools on a small table. A hat rack with a couple of bush hats and a holster stands next to the open door leading into the house. ENKOFO, attired in a rudimentary military uniform, leans against a veranda post, studying Hodister skeptically.

(Duet)

HODISTER

(after a moment, distracted)

Needle and thread, please, Enkofo...

Enkofo doesn't move.

HODISTER

(looking up)

Needle and thread, please.

ENKOFO

I don't know why you didn't cook him.

HODISTER

Cook him? I plan to paint him. I need an illustration for my notebook.

ENKOFO

A bird is meant to be cooked.

HODISTER

Like people, I suppose.

ENKOFO

Like some people, not all people —
Bula Matari doesn't understand.

HODISTER

Not this bird, and not these people.
Keep your boys off the villagers;
Too many rumors already.
Enkofo, the needle —

Enkofo opens a wooden toolbox and brings Hodister a needle and a spool of thread. Hodister threads the needle with great difficulty.

(Aria)

HODISTER

(stitching up the bird)

When your father is a seaman
that you never see,
and your mother pays the rent
beckoning from laced windows,
You quickly learn
there's not much hope
for a boy like that in Antwerp —
home of Rubens and Van Dyck.

ENKOFO

(looking at the bird)

(What a waste.)

HODISTER

No wonder I dreamed of leaving,
to be born all over again...

ENKOFO

(The heart should've been grilled...

HODISTER

...make a new name for myself
in some other place.

ENKOFO

...the feathers plucked for a hat).

HODISTER

So I looked up the Anglo-Belgian
India Rubber Company;
Listened to the old buzzard rattle on,
(buffo) "Plenty of opportunity
for a self-made man.
We'll put you on the next steamer to Boma."

*(Hodister finishes stitching up the
bird, and begins attaching its feet
to a pedestal.)*

HODISTER

(Cont.)

They never tell you about the heat,
 mosquitoes and malaria;
 And you're so eager, need the money;
 You have signed the contract,
 want to be on your way.

In Antwerp's cafes
 they talk of cannibals,
 and monstrous animals.
 You're wiser than they, you say
 it's silly speculation.

But only three days' journey
 up dark River Congo,
 You see there's truth in rumors.
 And while it's not
 what they imagined —
 the monsters are in your soul —
 God bless you
 if you can hang on
 to your humanity.

*Hodister props the mounted bird up on the veranda railing.
 The bird is breathtaking, frozen in flight.*

(Recitative)

ENKOFO

... the American woman's been snooping
 around.

HODISTER

(admiring his bird)

Mrs. Birkin?

ENKOFO

With her camera, stealing souls.

HODISTER

(turning to Enkofo)

You don't like her?

(Duetтино)

(Duettino)

ENKOFO

The woman is too sneaky,
sneaky like a lizard.

HODISTER

A lizard is ugly.

ENKOFO

A lizard turns up in your bedding
and bites you.

HODISTER

I wouldn't mind if Mrs. Birkin
did either of those things.

ENKOFO

She irritates me.

HODISTER

She gets under my skin,
and it's been so long —
She's beautiful.

ENKOFO

For a white woman.
She dresses like a man,
I don't trust her.

HODISTER

She smells sweet.

ENKOFO

She smells like death
(all white people do).

Hodister puts the sewing paraphernalia away, takes a holster and pistol hanging from a hat rack, and fastens it around his waist.

(Recitative)

ENKOFO

Her husband is worse.

HODISTER

He's an oaf.
With a beautiful wife.
Poor man is a missionary, you wouldn't
want to be in his position. Ignore him.

ENKOFO

How can I? He makes my job difficult,
incites Nzinga's people, tells them not to work.

HODISTER

Enkofo, I know you better than that.
You have your means.
When there's a quota to be filled,
you and your boys don't hesitate
to make the villagers cooperate.
Copal, latex, and ivory,
always turn up in the right quantity.

Fiona enters confidently, but hesitates at the sight of Enkofo.

FIONA

I'd like a word with you, Mister Hodister.

HODISTER

Don't be shy, Mrs. Birkin.

FIONA

Not in front of that man.

HODISTER

(looks over at Enkofo)

That's ok, Enkofo has some things to tend to.

Enkofo smiles knowingly, and exits.

HODISTER

Please have a seat, Mrs. Birkin.

She remains at the bottom of the stairs.

FIONA

(after Enkofo has exited)

That man is evil.
He has a fiendish face.

HODISTER

You can't blame a man for his face.

FIONA

I don't trust him.

HODISTER

Why should you?
He doesn't trust you either.
Like a drink? It's awfully hot.

FIONA

I'm not here to exchange pleasantries.

HODISTER

I can see that...

Hodister pours himself a scotch from a small bar on the veranda.

FIONA

You mustn't drink so much, Mr. Hodister.

HODISTER

Really? Don't you know you're to drink four liters a day?

FIONA

Water. Not scotch.

(Arioso)

HODISTER

(holding up his glass to toast)

Mrs. Birkin — to beauty.

Not just beauty, ravishing beauty.

"To a ravishingly beautiful flower
plucked from her ivory tower,
and dropped in the midst of a jungle."

(he sips)

(Recitative)

Life's not so pleasant here, is it?

FIONA

Don't mock me. I can cope better than you think.

HODISTER

I can imagine.

I'm not worried about you, though.

It's Mister Birkin concerns me.

FIONA

Harris has his strength.

HODISTER

Strength of spirit won't suffice here.

FIONA

My husband is a good man.

More than I can say for your friend.

HODISTER

Enkofo is not my friend.
But don't be so hard on him.
He has his qualities —
diligence, for one.

Hodister comes down from the veranda with his drink.

FIONA

I know about his diligence.
The way he diligently beats the villagers —

HODISTER

Only when they're lazy.
Quotas must be filled.

FIONA

So he can get his share.

HODISTER

We all want our share.

FIONA

He's a poor excuse for a soldier.

HODISTER

The Congo Free State must have its army.
How else to keep order?

FIONA

His henchmen steal from the villagers.

HODISTER

Tribalism, Mrs. Birkin.
Ask any of them, they'll tell you the same thing.

FIONA

You encourage them.

HODISTER

I ignore them.
Unless, of course,
it gets too messy.
Enkofo's diligence
can get the best of him...

He tells me your husband
is interfering.
You should know Enkofo's
not a man to mess with.

(Aria)

FIONA

If only you could see the good
my husband's trying to do here,
the great things he'll achieve.
Harris is a patient man,
taught Chicago's poor the classics,
showed freed slaves in Georgia
the guiding light of Jesus' love.
And Nzinga's people,
he'll teach them too,
the West's accomplishments,
your civilization you'd deny them.

Suddenly, Harris Birkin himself bursts onto the scene, proudly leading Lontulu, and followed by several of the villagers.

(Recitative)

HARRIS

Fiona, it's fantastic!

FIONA

What is it, dear?

HARRIS

Just two months ago,
the boy didn't speak a word of English,
but now you should hear him sing!

HODISTER

(mocking)

I'm sure it's impressive.

HARRIS

Fiona, get your camera ready.
Such an angelic voice, so pure —
if only there were a way to capture it.
Lontulu, step forward.

Lontulu steps shyly forward. Fiona sets up her camera.

HARRIS

(to Lontulu)

Don't be afraid.
You're not afraid, are you?

LONTULU

I'm not afraid.

HARRIS

Good.

(Arioso)

If ever you should be afraid,
offer up a prayer to the Lord —
“Ask and ye shall receive” —
and He will give you
all the strength you need.

(Recitative)

Now, let your voice carry to Nzinga,
so your father can hear what benefits
the Lord’s patience brings.

Lontulu... *(sings a scale)* Ah-ah-ah-ah-ahhhh.

LONTULU

(following)

Ah-ah-ah-ah-ahhhh.

HARRIS

(to Fiona)

Spectacular, isn’t it?

Now, Lontulu...

There is a big flash from Fiona’s camera. Harris begins to conduct Lontulu.

(Aria)

LONTULU

When fear and trembling come upon me,
and horror overwhelms me;
When I wish I had wings
like a dove,
and could fly off into
the wilderness;
I call upon the Lord,
and He delivers me —
He turns my mourning into dancing...

*(At the edge of the stage appears
Victor LeBlanc.
He listens to Lontulu bemused.)*

LONTULU

(Cont.)

The Lord is my refuge,
my strength in times of trouble;
And lest I sleep the sleep of death,
He lights up the darkness.
Weeping may endure for a night,
but joy will come in the morning.
And tomorrow my feet shall stand
within the gates of Jerusalem.

*There is a hushed silence after Lontulu has finished.
Even Hodister is amazed.*

(Recitative)

LEBLANC

(shattering the silence)

Bravo! Bravo!

HODISTER

(genuinely surprised)

(LeBlanc!)

LEBLANC

(stepping forward)

Now tell me, boy,
what is the meaning
of what you've just sung?

Lontulu just stares back at LeBlanc without responding.

LEBLANC

Hah! My point exactly.
All technique, no substance.
Poor boy hasn't learned a thing,
except to mimic like a parrot.

FIONA

Leave him alone.

HARRIS

You'll frighten him.

LEBLANC

Frighten him?
Don't worry,
he hates me too much
to be afraid.
Just look at him.
It's in his blood —
it's his father's royal line.

The villagers lead Lontulu off.

HODISTER

Why are you here, LeBlanc?
Our monthly meeting's not till Monday.

LEBLANC

(evasive)

Word from the main office.

HODISTER

Boma?

LEBLANC

No.

HODISTER

Antwerp.

LEBLANC

No...

(hesitates a moment)

... Brussels.

HODISTER

Brussels?

LEBLANC

They say from His Majesty, no less.

FIONA

Leopold?

HODISTER

Leopold?

HARRIS

Leopold?

LEBLANC

Leopold.

HODISTER

What about?

LEBLANC

New quotas, Arthur.

The automobile's flourishing —
our own King is very fond of them himself.

FIONA

(He has peculiar passions.)

LeBlanc crosses over to Fiona, and starts to inspect her camera.

LEBLANC

And an automobile's got four wheels,
five, if you count the spare.
With each wheel you need a tire,
each new automobile
needs five new tires —
that's a lot of tires in all...

HARRIS

A growing industry —

LEBLANC

Financed by his Majesty.

HODISTER

And now what do you want from me?

(Aria)

LEBLANC

There's money to be made
in pneumatics.
But for tires you need rubber,
and more tires mean more rubber,
and, frankly, Arthur,
we need more from you.

More money from pneumatics
means more money for you too —
I know you'll find a way to get your cut.

But just remember one thing —
to save some for our dear king —
'cause he owns half of everything,
and everything means you.

During the previous, Hodister has sat down on the veranda steps and stares out into space.

(Recitative)

LEBLANC

(noticing Hodister's condition)

Why so stupefied?

HODISTER

You say more. What is more?

LEBLANC

Double.

HODISTER

Double?! How?

Three kilos per person monthly
is hard enough to get.

LEBLANC

And now we want six.

HODISTER

There's no latex left,
we've completely tapped the vines.

LEBLANC

You have your plantations.

HODISTER

Too small. Too young. You know that.

LEBLANC

Arthur, we have high hopes for you.
Each must do his part
for each to get his share.

(Duettino)

(Duetto)

LEBLANC

You're a prominent piece of our puzzle.
You've come through in the past.
We'll leave it to your ingenuity.
We're sure you'll find a way.

LeBlanc exits.

HODISTER

How did I find my way into this system?
How much longer can I last?
There's a limit to a man's productivity.
There's a limit to the minutes in a day.

(Recitative)

FIONA

(packing her equipment away)

Must everyone here be so awful?

HODISTER

(irritated)

You've been here only two months,
you already dislike everyone.

HARRIS

She's sensitive.

HODISTER

I'm sure she is.

FIONA

Mister Hodister, you've been a fine host...

HODISTER

(Just keeping up appearances).

FIONA

...and when the mission's ready, we want
you to be our guest.
Just keep men like those away...

Enkofo returns.

(Quartet)

FIONA

Suddenly, I'm filled with apprehension.
There's much here I don't understand.
What new evil will the future bring us?
How much more cruel can cruel men be to
men?

HODISTER

She's right to feel such anxiety,
and I could easily begin to see her way.
But with money a man's got himself a name,
And to get a name is what I came here for.

HARRIS

I see the world's untapped potential
in China, Appalachia, Bombay.
We shall overcome superstition,
the light of Jesus' love will show the way.

ENKOFO

I'll admit I don't like these white people —
'cause you know I didn't invite them here.
But there's a way to come out a winner—
just let diligence be your guide.

LIGHTS TO BLACK

SINFONIA 2

Scene 2:

In front of Nzinga's hut.

Nzinga sits alone in front of his hut.

(Aria)

NZINGA

There was a time
we lived in dignity,
when the future was
something to pass on.
Lontulu, you would be
a guarantee to later generations.
But, these days,
one tree after another
is hacked down,
leaving nothing in its place.

I look at you now, my little man,
and struggle for words of hope.
It's not so long ago
I could hold you proudly,
and to the future point you.
Now I hold you fearfully,
this life will twist your soul.

There's someone wants to
take away your future,
thinks time exists
only for the white man.
There's much I could've shown you,
there's much you'll never know.
The only seeds planted now
will grow into vines of hate.
Yes, little man, I hold you fearfully —
this life will twist your soul.

The Villagers rush in excitedly.

(Chorus)

VILLAGERS

(off, approaching excitedly)

Children, flee faster than gazelles:
Bula Matari and Enkofo are approaching.
They want to chain you to one another.
Run, hide in the bush, and keep quiet.

WOMEN

My daughter searches for a reason,
 "Mother, let me cry."
 "Keep quiet, child,
 don't let your cries betray you."

MEN

My son says to me,
 "I will hide in our hut,
 it is safe there."
 "No, child, they will only burn it down."

VILLAGERS

We went to the juju priest, said,
 "Drive nails into your fetish."
 He did, said,
 "Spirit, kill the evil one."
 He must have done something wrong,
 Bula Matari and Enkofo
 are still approaching.

*Enter Hodister, Enkofo, and Enkofo's two Henchmen.
 The villagers gather around Nzinga.*

*Enkofo and his men stop at some distance away, while Hodister approaches
 Nzinga.*

(Recitative)

HODISTER

Nzinga, I haven't much to say.
 Simply, prepare your people.

NZINGA

What should I prepare them for, Bula Matari?

HODISTER

They are to travel.

NZINGA

Where to?

HODISTER

Don't make my job difficult.
 Prepare them for the bush,
 they will be going for latex.

NZINGA

But my people are tired,
they still have not recovered
from last month's harvest.
And there is no latex left,
you can only tap the vine
for so long.

ENKOFO

(interrupting)

Five days from here,
in the bush,
we're sure to find more latex.

NZINGA

Five days?
That is too far to walk.
We will collapse.

ENKOFO

If they collapse, we shoot them.

NZINGA

If you shoot us,
who will get your latex for you?

HODISTER

(breaking in)

You'll have three weeks.
And you must return
with six kilos each.
There, that's said.
And that's enough said.
You will leave this afternoon.

Enkofo takes Hodister aside.

ENKOFO

You will let them all leave?

HODISTER

The more hands the better.

ENKOFO

They may never come back.
What's to keep them from running away?

HODISTER

They've nothing to gain by it,
they're afraid of the bush —

ENKOFO

— the bush is harsh,
they may die there.

HODISTER

You'll take care of them.

ENKOFO

Not if they run.

HODISTER

Chain them together.

(Arioso)

ENKOFO

Let me suggest a way
that may be more effective —
you can chain them, tie them,
or nail them together;
you can cut off their ears,
their hands, their feet;
but nothing will keep them
from running, nothing better,
than keeping Nzinga here, their chief.
Keep him here,
and they will come back —

(Duet)

HODISTER

Keep him here — in the village?

ENKOFO

Lock him up —
that's what your prison's for.

HODISTER

Lock him up, like an animal?
Alone. We can't do that.
You can't cage a man up alone.

ENKOFO

(Not alone, you'll be with him too.)

HODISTER

(vacillating)

...but if they bring
enough latex back —

ENKOFO

If they're diligent,
and efficient,
and the quantity's sufficient,
we'll let them have their chief back.

HODISTER

And the boy...

ENKOFO

I'll watch over him, tenderly,
he's made of such sweet stuff.

HODISTER

(after a beat, decided)

Put him away.

A cell door appears upstage right; Lontulu enters downstage left. Enkofo signals the Henchmen, they come over and stand on either side of Nzinga.

Hodister turns to Nzinga. For a moment, they stand facing each other, then Enkofo has his henchmen lead Nzinga upstage to the cell.

Lontulu follows his father to the cell door. Enkofo places Nzinga in the cell, then locks the door. Nzinga and Lontulu gaze at each other one last time, before Enkofo gestures Lontulu away with a flick of his head. Lontulu returns to the villagers.

Enkofo and his men now join Hodister downstage left.

Hodister opens a trunk, and pulls out three muskets, a tin of gunpowder, balls, rags, pouches, etc. He hands the first musket to Enkofo.

ENKOFO

And what about the Albinis?

HODISTER

They stay here.

ENKOFO

We need them in the bush.

HODISTER

You know the rules, the Albinis stay here.
Only muskets in the bush.

ENKOFO

Then give us more bullets.

HODISTER

I'm giving you ten each.

ENKOFO

That's not enough.

HODISTER

(methodical, professional)

That's plenty. Use the fimbo whenever possible — we need to keep our workforce. Use guns only when necessary — for the severest laziness — use discretion. And you will keep count. You use a bullet, I want to see something for it — a body, a hand, a foot — you get what I mean. I know you do.

ENKOFO

(Completely.)

HODISTER

Now go. You have your quota. Time is short. You know what to do.

ENKOFO

(Diligence, sir, diligence.)

FADE TO BLACK.

ACT II

SINFONIA 3

As Sinfonia 3 comes to and end, curtain comes up on...

Scene 1:

In the bush. There are very few rubber vines.

One by one the villagers enter, search for vines, then, after finding them, tap them with fishbones. The white fluid latex slowly oozes out into small wooden cups which each villager holds or fastens next to the slit. Some villagers climb up trees to get to the vines; others stand or lie next to trees with vines.

(Chorus)

MEN

Enkofo stands over us with guns.
We drop from exhaustion —
it's not easy gathering latex
with empty stomachs.
We get no sleep
harvesting in the bush —
"careful up in that tree,
don't fall asleep!"
We fall, and, if we survive,
they whip us with fimbo.

WOMEN

Bula Matari took Enkofo and his
men away from their mothers,
from enemy villages far from here.
Knew it was better to set black men
against one another,
Bula Matari likes to keep
his white hands clean.

Lontulu ties his cup to the vine and steps forward.

(Aria w/ Chorus)

LONTULU

(cheerful)

The Smart Man and the Fool.

VILLAGERS

(annoyed)

You told us yesterday.

LONTULU

Today's a different day.

VILLAGERS

Better be different.

LONTULU

Smart Man and the Fool...

VILLAGERS

Tell us.

LONTULU

Two brothers — Smart Man and the Fool—
fished for their family's food.
By the river that swallows all rivers,
both cast out their nets.

VILLAGERS

Smart Man and the Fool,
both cast out their nets.

LONTULU

Now, Smart Man was sure he'd made
the strongest net around.
Fool, careful fool, checked his own net
each day for holes.

VILLAGERS

Smart Man sure, Fool careful.

LONTULU

Down to running river they went
to see what was in their nets.

Fool pulled up his net,
found it full of fish.

Smart Man's had no fish,
only holes.

VILLAGERS

Smart Man never checked his net.

LONTULU

That's right, never checked his net.

Smart Man smart, threw the net back in
the water, said,

"Fool, you are a fool, you pulled the
wrong net up, the one with all the fish
is mine."

Fool said, "Fine."

VILLAGERS

Smart Man smart, Fool a fool.

LONTULU

Brothers returned to family,

Smart Man said,

"See all the fish I caught,

Fool he caught nothing."

Mother cooked the fish,

father ate it, family ate it,

gave nothing to the Fool.

VILLAGERS

Mother cooked the fish,
gave nothing to the Fool.

LONTULU

It's a new day.

Down to running river they go
to see what's in their nets.

Fool pulls up his net,
finds it full of fish.

Smart Man's has no fish,
only holes.

VILLAGERS

What? Smart Man still not fix his net?

LONTULU

That's right, still not fix his net.
 Smart Man smart, throws the net back in
 the water, says,
 "Fool, you are a fool, you pulled
 the wrong net up, the one with all the fish
 is mine."
 Fool says, "Fine."

VILLAGERS

Smart Man smart, Fool a fool.

LONTULU

Brothers go home to family,
 Smart Man says,
 "See all the fish I caught,
 Fool he caught nothing."
 Mother cooks the fish,
 father eats it, family eats it,
 give nothing to the Fool.

VILLAGERS

Mother cooks the fish,
 give nothing to the Fool.

LONTULU

But, it's a new day!

VILLAGERS

It's a new day!

LONTULU

Fishbone catch in father's throat,
 and he begins to choke.
 Smart Man says,
 "Fool, go get the doctor!"

VILLAGERS

Fishbone catch in father's throat,
 "Fool, go get the doctor!"

LONTULU

But Fool sings:

"Everyday you take my fish,
you eat and eat, and let me starve.
Now, you choke and cry for help,
and wish you'd never eaten."

VILLAGERS

Sing, Fool, sing!

LONTULU

Fool sings,
"Soon, you'll breathe your last breath,
soon, you'll choke and be dead.
Now, don't you wish that, all this time,
you'd let me eat instead?"

(Enkofo enters and surveys the scene)

VILLAGERS

Sing, Fool, sing!
Who's the Smart Man now?

The Villagers finally notice Enkofo and stop abruptly.

Enkofo approaches Lontulu. He takes Lontulu's face into his hands and gazes into it.

(Recitative w/ Chorus)

ENKOFO

(after a moment)

What a shame... What am I going to do with you?

He lets Lontulu go brusquely. The villagers resume working.

Enkofo begins the rounds. He inspects the taps one by one.

ENKOFO

(checking a cup)

You're getting splinters in there...

VILLAGERS

(sotto voce)

You've got to keep things clean...

ENKOFO

(at another)

...idiot, you've cut the bark too deeply,
you will kill the vine...

VILLAGERS

(sotto voce)

You've got to keep things clean...

ENKOFO

(at another)

...your bowl is filthy, this will make
lousy rubber...

VILLAGERS

(sotto voce)

You've got to keep things clean...

ENKOFO

(turning to the Villagers)

You've got to keep things clean!

Enkofo stops at another vine.

ENKOFO

There is no latex in this cup.

VILLAGERS

There is a small amount.

ENKOFO

It might as well be empty.

VILLAGERS

What can we do? It's the vine.

ENKOFO

Then you picked a bad vine.

*(He motions one of
the villagers away from the vines)*

Come here.

Hesitantly, the Villager, Efomi, comes to Enkofo.

ENKOFO

Get down.

Efomi kneels down, and looks up at Enkofo pleadingly.

(Aria)

ENKOFO

Why do you look at me that way?
I've seen the look of horror
in a dying person's eyes.
It's not the fear,
but his weakness I despise.

*(Enkofo removes the fimbo
from his belt.)*

On your stomach...

*(Enkofo pushes Efomi onto
his stomach. He raises
his fimbo and begins
to whip Efomi's back.)*

A squeaky wheel must be oiled.
You don't do your job,
I have to hear about it.
It's all in the numbers,
Bula Matari is keeping count.
All it takes is motivation,
I'm only here for inspiration.

EFOMI

(after several strokes)
(cries out) Aah, aah!

ENKOFO

You don't like that?
On your hands and knees.

Efomi gets up on all fours.

ENKOFO

Now, you are a hippo!

Enkofo strikes out at him again with the whip.

ENKOFO

Crawl... crawl like a hippo!

Efomi begins to crawl away towards the forest.

ENKOFO

Where are you going?!

He lashes out one more time; Efomi cries out again.

ENKOFO

Why do you bother to shout?
You're just making a bad impression.
Anyway, there's no one who can hear you!

Suddenly, the sound of a GUNSHOT offstage.

ENKOFO

(stops; rolls up the whip)

Be glad that wasn't you...

He puts the whip back in his belt. Efomi crawls back to the others.

Enter the Henchmen. Each carries a rifle slung over his shoulder, and they carry a freshly killed wild pig between them.

(Trio)

FIRST HENCHMAN

(buffo)

He wanted to name the pig Nzinga.

SECOND HENCHMAN

(buffo)

He wanted to name the pig Bula Matari.

FIRST HENCHMAN

I said, "you're right, to us they're both the same."
It's only a question of color.

First Henchman takes a stick, sharpens it, skewers the pig from tail to head, props him upright in the ground.

SECOND HENCHMAN

So I said, "let's cook him, and see
what color he becomes."

FIRST HENCHMAN

(laying a string of peppers

around the pig's neck like a necklace)

A little piri-piri!

SECOND HENCHMAN

(anointing the pig with salt)

A little salt!

FIRST HENCHMAN

*(sticking an onion
on the head like a crown)*

An onion!

SECOND HENCHMAN

You see, Enkofo, you can eat well in
the bush.

ENKOFO

Don't tell me you caught that pig with
your bare hands.

FIRST HENCHMAN

Course not.

SECOND HENCHMAN

I shot him!

FIRST HENCHMAN

I would've shot him first,
but my powder was wet.

ENKOFO

And the bullet?

SECOND HENCHMAN

(inspecting the pig)
It's in there somewhere...

ENKOFO

Bula Matari keeps count.

Enkofo walks over to the Villagers (who have been trying to work through all of this). Slowly, Enkofo paces past them, looking each over. Finally, he takes Lontulu and leads him back to the Henchmen.

ENKOFO

(to First Henchman)

Give me your knife.

First Henchman gives his machete to Enkofo.

ENKOFO

(to Second Henchman)

Hold his hand.

Second Henchman takes Lontulu's hand and holds his arm stretched out.

ENKOFO

*(raising the machete above his head,
ready to strike down on Lontulu's wrist)*

Bula Matari counts everything —

Enkofo begins his downward swing.

LIGHTS BLACK OUT.

SINFONIA 4

Scene 2:

In Hodister's office.

A few basic items of furniture, including a small clock, and a guncase in the corner; a small mirror hangs on the wall.

To the left, Hodister sits at his desk, writing a letter. On a pedestal in the middle of the room is the stuffed bird. Near it is an easel with an unfinished watercolor painting of the bird.

To the right, Nzinga sits in the cell, behind bars.

(Duet)

HODISTER

(writing)

"No new events
worth mentioning...
And no new feelings either."

(he opens a ledger lying on his desk)

"Last month's figures —

NZINGA

(from his cell)

In Songolongo,
not far from here...

HODISTER

Villages in the region:
six;
able-bodied men:
fourteen hundred...

NZINGA

...the overseers took the chief,
tied him to a tree —
and slaughtered him.
They sold the body to his son,
who had to barter his wife
into slavery
just to give his father
a decent burial.

Would you do that to me,
Bula Matari ?

HODISTER

Deliveries of fish and or meat:
 one thousand four hundred eighty portions;
 manioc loaves:
 three hundred;
 palm oil:
 eighty liters;
 and three antelopes...

NZINGA

Did I tell you
 how my sister lost her foot ?
 Her husband was away
 in the bush,
 collecting latex,
 when Enkofo tried to have her.
 She refused.
 For her fidelity
 his henchmen shot her...
 On her ankle she always wore
 a brass bracelet;
 those greedy men, they
 cut off her foot to get it.
 My sister lived
 but now she has no foot.

Will you ask that of me,
 Bula Matari ?

HODISTER

As for latex —
 our raison d'être —
 the minimal tariff
 of three kilos per person,
 among seven hundred eighty harvesters,
 total tariff:
 two thousand three hundred forty kilos."

(pauses for a moment)

"Actual deliveries:
 a disappointing thousand kilos."

NZINGA

Do you remember, Bula Matari,
 how you almost died
 when you first came here ?
 You fell ill,
 like what happens to all white men.
 Your little pills, and your injections —
 you'd run out of them.
 Your Belgian friends,
 they all laughed at you,
 said you had no business being here.
 That's when we found you,
 sweating under the baobab tree.
 We took you home, and bathed you,
 and shooed the flies away.
 And from day to day
 we brought you water.
 It was not long
 before you walked again.
 Look where you stand today —

Would you do that for me,
 Bula Matari .

HODISTER

(he closes the ledger)

"In a few days, the villagers will be
 back from the bush,
 let us hope this month's harvest
 is better."

Hodister signs the letter, gets up and crosses to the easel.

*He sizes the bird up a moment, takes a brush, and applies some color to the paper.
 Fiona and Harris appear at the edge of the stage.*

(Recitative)

HARRIS

There are rumors, Hodister!

Hodister puts down his brush and turns towards the Birkins.

HODISTER

Rumors? Rumors are more rampant here
 than mosquitoes.

Hodister returns to his desk and sits down.

FIONA

The Swedish missionaries found two
villagers who fled from Enkofo.
Their backs were swollen from whipping,,
maggots in the scabs.
They are with the Swedes — afraid to
return to Lulonga.

HARRIS

Enkofo and his henchmen have gone wild.

HODISTER

You don't know how things work,
these people can be lazy.

HARRIS

(indicating the cell)

And what about this?

HODISTER

Keeping this man here
is the only way
to make sure things get done.

FIONA

You can't expect us to remain silent.

HODISTER

You're really being difficult.
If I were you, I wouldn't make such a stink.
The law here is not in your hands.
You want your mission in this village?
Then keep quiet.

Fiona goes over to the easel and pauses to look at it.

HARRIS

I pray for your soul, Hodister.
It's never too late to repent.

The clock strikes 3.

(Aria)

(Aria)

HODISTER

Three o'clock, a sacred hour,
Birkin, let me be.
Every day,
this time belongs to me.
I never knew her name,
the little girl across the street.
But everyday, at three,
she played her piano,
just for me, or so I felt.
Such a decent thing to do.

*Fiona and Harris back away slowly as
Hodister goes on.*

One day, I'll return to Antwerp,
I'll have a house like that,
maybe a little girl,
and she'll have her piano too.

The Birkins exit. Hodister goes to the window and gazes out for a moment. He takes a deep breath.

Nzinga watches from his cell.

(Recitative)

NZINGA

(after a moment)

Bula Matari...

Hodister doesn't hear him.

NZINGA

(again)

Bula Matari.

This time Hodister turns to look at Nzinga.

NZINGA

I would like to be standing
where you are, Bula Matari,
and take in the fresh air.

HODISTER

When the villagers return.

NZINGA

Your memory is short.

HODISTER

In this place, memory is a luxury.

NZINGA

Memory is all we have.

Hodister steps towards the cell.

HODISTER

What can I do?

You want water?

We won't have water until tonight.

Want scotch? There's plenty of that —

No answer.

HODISTER

I try...

After a moment, LeBlanc bursts into the office.

LEBLANC

Where are they?

HODISTER

Who?

LEBLANC

Those lazy natives — don't understand
the value of work.

HODISTER

They're not due back for days yet.

LEBLANC

Let's hope, for your sake,
they return with plenty of latex.

HODISTER

They will if Enkofo's done his job.

LEBLANC

There's a man of example. Why can't
they all do their jobs as well as your Enkofo?

Suddenly, LeBlanc notices Nzinga watching from his cell.

(Trio)

LEBLANC

(to Nzinga)

What are you looking at?

NZINGA

Nothing, Bula Matari.

LEBLANC

You were looking at me.

NZINGA

Yes, Bula Matari.

LEBLANC

(to Hodister)

Give me the key.

HODISTER

(apprehensive)

What for?

LEBLANC

Just give it to me.

Hodister reluctantly hands the key to LeBlanc, who goes over and opens the cell.

LEBLANC

Come out of there.

Nzinga comes out slowly. LeBlanc pulls the chair out from behind Hodister's desk and places it in front of Nzinga.

LEBLANC

Have a seat, chief.

Nzinga sits down. Hodister watches apprehensively.

LEBLANC

You look dirty. You haven't shaved.

Nzinga remains silent.

LEBLANC

I said you haven't shaved.

NZINGA

I never shave.

LEBLANC

Well, it looks dirty.

We need to do something about that.

Don't you think, Hodister?

HODISTER

A little beard doesn't bother me...

LEBLANC

(annoyed)

I don't know why I ask you,

grooming's not your strong point.

LeBlanc pulls a straight razor out of his pocket. Nzinga stiffens.

LEBLANC

Don't be a fool — don't move —

LeBlanc grabs the end of Nzinga's beard with one hand and begins to slowly cut off the beard.

LEBLANC

See? I won't hurt you.

LeBlanc finishes and throws the hair on the floor. He takes a small mirror from the wall and holds it in front of Nzinga.

LEBLANC

See the improvement?

Nzinga refuses to look in the mirror.

HODISTER

That's enough, LeBlanc.

LEBLANC

(to Nzinga)

Well, you can take my word for it,

it's an improvement.

LeBlanc lays the mirror on the desk; he turns and feigns surprise.

LEBLANC

Good lord, look at the mess!

There's hair on the floor!

*LeBlanc takes a broom from the corner and hands it to Nzinga.
Nzinga remains motionless.*

LEBLANC

What are you waiting for — ?

Nzinga remains still.

LEBLANC

(raising his voice)

I said, what are you waiting for?

HODISTER

(suddenly, and loudly)

LeBlanc!

LeBlanc turns slowly to face Hodister.

HODISTER

(calmly, slowly)

Leave.

LeBlanc stands there sizing up Hodister

LEBLANC

(after a moment)

Don't get soft, Hodister.

He turns and leaves.

After LeBlanc exits, Hodister leads Nzinga back to the cell, and closes the gate.

NZINGA

You don't have to lock it.

I've got no place else to go.

Hodister looks at him for a moment, then locks the gate anyway.

Hodister goes back to the middle of the room, puts the chair back in its place behind the desk; he takes the mirror off of the desk, hangs it back on the wall. He looks at himself briefly in the mirror, then takes the broom, goes back to the middle of the room and slowly sweeps up Nzinga's hair.

LIGHTS FADE SLOWLY TO BLACK

ACT III

SINFONIA 5

Scene 1:

The Veranda of Hodister's house.

The Rainy Season has begun. It is early evening; the atmosphere is humid, deliriously sensual. Fiona watches from the veranda as canoes slip past on the river, headed upstream to the neighboring village, whose fires can be seen up the river. Harris drinks beer from a bottle while reclining in a hammock which hangs on the veranda; Hodister sits at the other end of the veranda watching Fiona.

(Trio)

HARRIS

At last, a respite from this wretched rain.

FIONA

(gazing into the distance)

They're paddling upriver —

HARRIS

— practicing polygamy.
It's disgusting — this wives business—
how can you teach them "they came
two by two"...?
Where do you keep your beer, Hodister?

HODISTER

(rises out of his chair)

I'll get it for you.

HARRIS

I can take care of myself.

HODISTER

Please...

Hodister goes to the bar, opens a door, and pulls out a beer. He brings it over to Birkin.

FIONA

(still watching)

The oars dipping in send ripples across the water —
I can see their fires reflected in it...

HARRIS

(drinks from his beer)

These locals make a strong brew.

HODISTER

Watch yourself, Birkin.

FIONA

... long sleek vessels,
slipping deeper into darkness.

HARRIS

Ever been to America, Hodister?

HODISTER

Never.

HARRIS

Great pubs in Chicago.
You really ought to go.

*Hodister pours himself
another scotch.*

HODISTER

Didn't know a man of the cloth went
to pubs.

HARRIS

First, a man of the people;
then, a man of the cloth.
Isn't that right, Fiona?

FIONA

People are a mystery.

HARRIS

(correcting her)

God is a mystery.

HODISTER

Your wife is right. There's no mystery
to God.

HARRIS

Darling, come lie with me...

FIONA

Not now. I'm watching the river.

HARRIS

...the beer is getting to me.

HODISTER

Don't swing the hammock.

HARRIS

You're right, I should relax.

FIONA

You work too hard.

HARRIS

Relaxing with a white man is easier than
with black men...

HODISTER

You have to set a good example for
your flock.

HARRIS

(with a sigh)

... Being upright is so exhausting.

FIONA

I don't know what it is,
it's still a mystery to me,
but with their skin
so deep, so dark, so penetrating,
they make me feel alive...

HARRIS

(absently)

Don't get too close to them, dear.

FIONA

(turning)

Why not? You do.

HARRIS

(drifting)

It's true... it's true...

Harris drifts off to sleep. Hodister approaches Fiona.

(Duet)

HODISTER

I envy you.

Fiona just stands looking at Hodister silently.

FIONA

(after a pause)

Is it really me you envy?

HODISTER

Standing in the midst of all of this,
you still feel the magic.

FIONA

I'll admit that sometimes happens,
in spite of what I see around me.

HODISTER

There was a time, when as a boy,
I stared at the map by my bed,
pointed to a big blank space, a mystery, and said,
"Someday, I shall go there."
Now, after seven years,
all that's left for me to say,
is that I have breathed in
the sweatfilled, tropical air,
at midnight, in the heart
of darkest Africa —
and felt very lonely there.

FIONA

Why are there no white women here, Hodister?

HODISTER

No man would bring his wife.

FIONA

What about Harris?

HODISTER

The unfortunate exception.

FIONA

Have you —

HODISTER

Yes?

FIONA

Have you —

HODISTER

Yes?

FIONA

Have you ever?

HODISTER

With a black woman, you mean?

FIONA

Yes.

HODISTER

And what was it like?

FIONA

Yes.

(Arioso)

HODISTER

Afterwards — before the morning —
 she would have to sneak away,
 ashamed of sleeping with the white man.
 But that was years ago,
 when a man and a woman
 of different color
 could try, at least,
 to love one another.
 Now, a white man takes her forcefully.

Suddenly, Harris drops his beer bottle, startling Fiona and Hodister, who watch as a sleeping Harris settles comfortably into his hammock. Fiona turns away.

(Recitative)

HODISTER

Mrs. Birkin,
 do you think there's hope
 for a man who got to where
 he dreamed of being,
 only to find he didn't fit
 into his own dream?

FIONA

Hodister, it's not too late,
you might get a second chance.

HODISTER

"Opportunity only knocks once."

FIONA

That's what they say...

Monkeys start to chatter in the trees in the distance.

HODISTER

(listening)

Monkeys... it will start to rain again soon.

He goes to the bar and pours himself yet another scotch.

Fiona watches him scornfully.

Hodister takes a sip, then notices Fiona watching him.

He puts his glass down.

Suddenly, it does start to rain. Fiona crosses over, takes off her jacket and places it over the sleeping Harris, who barely stirs. The rain gets heavier; Hodister crosses to Fiona and puts his jacket over her shoulders.

HODISTER

(gently)

You should look after yourself...

Fiona.

She turns to face him and they embrace. They begin to kiss — at first tentatively, then, finally, passionately.

Harris rolls over and settles into his hammock.

Hodister and Fiona continue fervently, oblivious to Harris lying nearby.

The rain begins to get heavier.

After a moment, LeBlanc appears, getting soaked in the rain, watching Hodister and Fiona.

(Recitative)

LEBLANC

(after a moment)

Very good, Hodister, very good...!

HODISTER

LeBlanc, what the hell are you doing?

LEBLANC

Behold your beloved,
my friend, your Delilah.

FIONA

(Look at him —
the drunken devil.)

LEBLANC

Someone's been talking.
You haven't heard.
American and English missionaries
have really made a noise.
They use words like "atrocities"
so freely
you'd think we didn't have
a business to run.
This is serious, it's gotten too big.
Belgium's parliament wants to take our
Congo away from us.
It's no longer Leopold's Parliament.
Soon it won't be his Congo either.

HODISTER

Get out of the rain,
you'll catch a chill...

LEBLANC

The inspectors will soon be here...
They'll be sniffing around like rats.
Things could change forever.
There goes everything...

FIONA

Everything is just beginning...

HODISTER

Go home, LeBlanc.
Get some sleep.

(Aria)

LEBLANC

Sleep?!
 I haven't slept in months.
 Everything we've worked for,
 for years,
 is about to disappear,
 and you tell me to go home and sleep?

*(LeBlanc suddenly pulls his pistol
 out of the holster, and points
 the gun at imaginary intruders)*

They're knocking at my door,
 Hodister,
 they want to know what's inside.
 They want to rummage through my past,
 as if I've got something to hide.

Sleep?!
 The rain goes on for days, for weeks,
 everything in my house is damp.
 I stand in the middle of my room
 at night, half-awake.

*(Now, LeBlanc points the gun at
 something on the ground)*

Look!
 The lizards crawl
 in and out of my bed!
 The thoughts race
 around in my head!

*(LeBlanc points the gun at Hodister
 and Fiona)*

Just like you,
 I had my reasons
 for coming here,
 to try my luck,
 and make a buck,
 civilize these savages.
 The king himself insisted,
 Europe itself endorsed it.
 Why won't they leave us alone?

*(He points the gun once again at
 imaginary intruders)*

LEBLANC

(Cont.)

How can I sleep?!
 There are sounds outside my window,
 I wait for someone to come in.
 There's no safety when you've got
 something they want.
 But I've got nothing to hide.
 I only did as I was told.
 It was the only way
 the system could work.

*(LeBlanc starts aiming wildly
 in every direction)*

Each must do his part,
 for each to get his share...
 Each must do his part,
 for each to get his share...
 Each must do his part,
 for each to get his share...

He suddenly puts the gun to his head and fires, killing himself, as —

HARRIS

*(bolts upright in the hammock,
 startled awake)*

Huh?!

THE LIGHTS GO BLACK

SINFONIA 6

SINFONIA 7

Scene 2:

Hodister's office.

Outside, the steamship S.S. Roi des Belges sits docked at the river bank.

Inside, stillness and serenity. Hodister sits at his desk writing in his ledger. The cell door is open, the cell empty — Nzinga is no longer there. The watercolor of the bird stands finished. The bird itself has been moved downstage.

(Aria with Chorus)

HODISTER

(reading as he writes)

"Yesterday, the Villagers returned..."

VILLAGERS

(outside)

The price was steep.
Nzinga weeps,
a father's heart is hurting.

HODISTER

(continuing)

"Good news first:
Baskets delivered:
forty four,
each six kilos;
total for Lulonga:
two hundred sixty four kilos..."

MEN

(outside)

The price was steep;
Nzinga in his hut lies ill —

WOMEN

— Doctor, do something.

HODISTER

"The bad news:
five villagers dead,
two run away."

What will I say to Enkofo?

VILLAGERS

(outside)

Make a potion for Nzinga,
make him sleep peacefully.
Drive his dreadful dreams away,
let him wake up to a new day.

HODISTER

(closing the ledger)

Tomorrow is market day,
we'll see how well
the other villages performed —

There is a commotion at Hodister's door, when suddenly Harris enters, leading two Villagers, Efomi and Mboyoy, who carry an enormous trunk. (Efomi is the one Enkofo whipped in Act II). Fiona enters after them.

(Recitative)

HARRIS

(to Efomi & Mboyoy)

Leave it by the door —

They continue into the room.

HARRIS

(irritated)

Didn't you hear me?
I said leave it by the door —

FIONA

Be gentle with them, dear.

HARRIS

(gentler, to Efomi and Mboyoy)

Near the door.

They put the trunk down near the door.

HODISTER

(referring to Efomi and Mboyoy)

Where did you find them?

HARRIS

With the Swedes. You have nothing
to say about this.

HODISTER

You have an agreement?

HARRIS

They signed.

EFOMI

Enkofo only wants to whip us.

MBOYO

Nothing left to eat in Lulonga.

HODISTER

(to Efomi)

You understand the terms.

EFOMI

Yes, Bula Matari.

HODISTER

Seven years is a long time...

HARRIS

They'll be safe. They'll work at the mission in Boma —

FIONA

(interrupting)

Hodister, we are leaving.

HARRIS

Leaving this den of thieves,
this polygamous paradise.
Some seeds land on fallow ground,
you learn to know when it's time to go.

(to Efomi and Mboyoy)

Alright. Let's get moving.

Efomi and Mboyoy remain in place.

(Quintet)

FIONA

(she approaches Hodister tentatively)

This morning I woke up early,
 watched the grimy cloud of steam
 creep along the forest edge.
 I sighed when the Roi des Belges
 finally peered round the river bend —
 the weary face of a forgotten friend.

HARRIS

(Frustrated)

What's wrong with you? We're leaving.

EFOMI

Your trunk is too heavy.

MBOYO

We'll never get it to the boat.

HARRIS

What a way to begin our relationship.

*Harris looks over at Fiona,
 who doesn't see him,
 then back at Efomi at Mboyoy.*

EFOMI

We agreed it would be lighter.

HARRIS

How much lighter can it be?

(he opens the trunk)

Nothing extraneous in here. Look.

EFOMI

(peers inside, pulls something out)

What's this?

HARRIS

Ivory spoons. Such craftsmanship.

Efomi throws them away.

EFOMI

(reaching into the trunk)

And these?

HARRIS

Stately statuettes. Such elegance.

EFOMI

(throwing them away)

I won't ask how you got them.

HODISTER

(alone with Fiona)

Will you return to America?

FIONA

No, we'll go to London.
The Missionary Society
will testify in Parliament.
We've sent them photos, you know.

HODISTER

I know. We were told.

FIONA

They will push for reform.
It's already begun.
Will you stay?

HODISTER

A man can vanish in an instant here.
Some are dragged away
into the dark of night.
Others change their names
and move on to new adventures.

Mboyo reaches in and pulls out a bag.

MBOYO

And this?

HARRIS

Exquisite, ebony, ivory. I didn't show
you how to play chess?

MBOYO

(looks at Efomi)

Chess?

EFOMI

Chess?

*Mboyo turns the bag over
and empties its contents.*

MBOYO

(pulling a wooden chair from the trunk)

This?

HARRIS

(fed up)

Solid, stable, secure.

(That's what my behind needs).

You know I'm not a small man.

Efomi throws the chair aside.

FIONA

Harris was a promising young man from the start,

Mother loved him right away.

Of course, he was much thinner then,

but you could see he had a big heart.

Father wouldn't come out to meet him, though,

stayed in the parlor and played the piano...

HODISTER

You had a piano in your parents' house?

*Efomi and Mboyo go through
the trunk's remaining contents,
letting Harris keep his clothes and books.*

FIONA

Harris will show me the world...

(to Harris, preparing to go)

Dear ? Dear...

*Satisfied that only the basics
are left in the trunk, Efomi and Mboyo
close it up, lift it, and carry it out
past an incredulous Harris.*

HODISTER

So many ways to see the world...

(Quintet)

Just then, Lontulu enters, minus his hand. The Birkins freeze.

LONTULU

You are leaving, sir?

HARRIS

Yes, Lontulu.

It's time for us to go.

LONTULU

Before you leave, sir,
explain something I don't understand.
You taught me,
if ever I should be afraid,
to offer up a prayer to the Lord.
"Ask and ye shall receive"
all the strength you need.

HARRIS

(That's right).

LONTULU

"Ask and ye shall receive."
"Just offer up a prayer."
Am I doing something wrong?
Should Lontulu speak louder to the Lord?
I pray and pray for him
to give me back my hand, but,
when I look,
there's nothing there.

HARRIS

Lontulu...

"Weeping may endure for a night,
but joy will come in the morning.
And tomorrow my feet shall stand
within the gates of Jerusalem."
You must remember to keep your faith.

LONTULU

Faith, sir? What is faith?

HARRIS

(after a moment)

Maybe that's for another time.

EFOMI

(pulling out a black book)

This? What is this book?

HARRIS

My bible. The Word of the Lord.

EFOMI

(throwing it back in the trunk)

That you can keep.

*Mboyo holds up the camera,
inspects it, puts it back respectfully.*

FIONA

Dear...

HARRIS

Let's go, Fiona.

Fiona studies Hodister's face. After a moment, she joins Harris, who turns to go.

They exit as Enkofo enters carrying the muskets, supplies, and the fimbo in his belt. Tied to the belt is a string of dried hands.

Hodister watches as Lontulu approaches the bird downstage, then stops to gaze at it, mystified.

ENKOFO

(looking towards the door)

She took her camera.

He took his bible.

But their smell remains.

(Duet)

Hodister remains watching Lontulu.

ENKOFO

Bula Matari's thoughts are far away.

HODISTER

(finally acknowledging him)

You did well, Enkofo.

Of course, you made it worth your while...

ENKOFO

(smiles)

You don't need to worry about me.

Lontulu approaches Enkofo slowly.

ENKOFO

I was taught to take care of myself.
As long as there's an enemy,
Enkofo will never go hungry.

(he notices Lontulu staring at the hands)

What are you staring at?
See something you think is yours?

HODISTER

I'll take the muskets.

ENKOFO

*(placing the muskets and supplies
on Hodister's desk)*

What should I have done?
Bula Matari counts everything.
Bring me something for a bullet,
don't upset the system,
Enkofo can always be replaced.

(he holds the string of hands out to Hodister)

HODISTER

(after a moment)

You can keep them...

Lontulu reaches out and grabs the string of hands. He flees out the door.

ENKOFO

He will grow up to hate me,
he will grow up to hate you too.

HODISTER

What will you do with him?

ENKOFO

(turning to leave)

You know. You know.
You know what we will do...

*Enkofo exits. Hodister puts the muskets away in the guncase.
He goes back to his desk, sits down, opens the desk drawer, pulls out a sheet of
paper, and begins to write a letter.*

(Solo with Chorus)

HODISTER

(reading as he writes)

“Dear sir,
I regret to have to inform you
that our dear friend and colleague,
Victor LeBlanc, has met his fate.
Whether he now rests in peace,
or writhes in endless torment,
only his God knows for certain,
for LeBlanc’s life was ended
by LeBlanc’s own hand.”

VILLAGERS

(outside)

The doctor works his spell.
Nzinga sleeps.
He will awake a strengthened man.

Hodister looks over at the window.

HODISTER

Sleep satisfied, Nzinga,
you’ve one less Bula Matari to worry about.

(he continues writing)

“It will please you to know that,
up to the moment of his very bitter end,
LeBlanc did his job with diligence...”

The clock strikes 3 — Hodister’s sacred hour.

THE END

