

**AFRICANUS**  
Spiritual Drama  
By Dale Ahlquist

Author's Note:

In writing this play, I relied on the following resources:

*For Beloved Africa: One Woman's Extraordinary Work* by Sr. Genevieve Kudlik

*Go Out to the Whole World: The Call of Mary Theresa Ledochowska* by Maria Winowska

*Two Open Hands Ready to Give: The Life and Work of Blessed Mary Theresa Ledochowska* by Sr. Mary Theresa Walzer

*A Shared Vision, A Shared Mission: The Shaping of a Community* by Maria Giertych

*The Charism of the Missionary Sisters of St. Peter Claver* by P. Abilio Pina Ribeiro

*At the Service of a Great Cause* by Roland Quesnel

Interview with Sister Genevieve of the Missionary Sisters of St. Peter Claver in St. Paul, Minn.

Everything that is factual came out of these materials. Everything else must be blamed on me. Most of the characters are historical, but a few are not. Most of the events really happened, but sometimes not exactly the way I have portrayed them.

Cast of Characters

17 Females; 14 Males

MARY THERESA LEDOCHOWSKA

MELANIE ERNST

COUNT ANTON LEDOCHOWSKA Mary Theresa's Father

SEPHINE LEDOCHOWSKA Mary Theresa's Mother

JULIE Mary Theresa's Sister

WLADIMIR Mary Theresa's Brother

JULES OSTROWSKI

PRINCESS ALICE, GRAND DUCHESS OF TUSCANY

COUNTESS ELISE von KUBELBECK A Lady-in-Waiting

FIRST LADY-IN-WAITING

SECOND LADY-IN-WAITING

BARTOLLO

BARON von HERSCHENBURG

BARONESS von HERSCHENBURG

MR. SCHMIDT

MRS. SCHMIDT

CARDINAL LAVIGERIE

FATHER THUET Secretary to Cardinal Lavigerie

POPE LEO XIII

MOTHER FRANCES

SISTER CLARA

FIGURE IN THE GARDEN

BUTLER

FIRST GIRL

SECOND GIRL

FATHER KOLB

Spiritual Advisor to Mary Theresa

BERNARD

REBECCA

SISTER ROSA

VALERIE

MISSIONARY

## ACT I

- Scene 1 – The Grounds Of The Ledochowska Estate
- Scene 2 – Mary Theresa’ Bedroom, Ledochowska Home
- Scene 3 – Ledochowska Home
- Scene 4 – Court Of Tuscany
- Scene 5 – The Vatican
- Scene 6 – Court Of Tuscany
- Scene 7 – Office Of Cardinal Lavigerie
- Scene 8 – Court Of Tuscany
- Scene 9 – Court Of Tuscany
- Scene 10 – Lucerne
- Scene 11 – Onboard A Ferry
- Scene 12 – Hotel Axenstein
- Scene 13 – Court Of Tuscany
- Scene 14 – Convent

## ACT II

- Scene 1 – Wolkenstein Estate
- Scene 2 – Fr. Kolb’s Church
- Scene 3 – Mary Theresa’s Office
- Scene 4 – Fr. Kolb’s Church
- Scene 5 – The Vatican
- Scene 6 – Ledochowska Estate
- Scene 7 – A Breakfast Table In Austria
- Scene 8 – Lecture Hall
- Scene 9 – Maria Sorg
- Scene 10 – Maria Sorg
- Scene 11 – St. Peter Claver House, Rome
- Scene 12 – Mary Theresa’s Bedroom, St. Peter Claver House, Rome

### Approximate Length

105 minutes

PRELUDE

Setting: A dark stage.

At Rise: A spotlight slowly comes up on MELANIE at extreme stage right.

MELANIE

I have never been to Africa. I have only lived its stories through the eyes and ears of others. But they are not the stories of wild elephants and roaring lions and galloping zebras. They are the stories of people, the African people, made in the image of God. People...who have been treated as worse than animals. Slaves.

(Pauses)

I have never been to Africa. And the woman who brought Africa to me – she had never been to Africa either. But Africa came to her. And Africa came to me.

BLACKOUT

ACT I  
Scene 1

Setting: The grounds of the Ledochowska Estate.

At Rise: JULES and MARY THERESA stroll across the stage, she on his arm. Entering behind them, several paces back, are ANTON and SEPHINE, she on his arm. JULES and MARY THERESA stop. ANTON and SEPHINE also stop, keeping a respectful distance.

SEPHINE

Do you think he likes her?

ANTON

There is something wrong with him if he doesn't.

SEPHINE

That is her father talking.

ANTON

Well, I am her father. How else do you expect me to talk?

SEPHINE

I want to know what Jules Ostrowski thinks of her.

ANTON

She has been utterly charming to him during his whole visit.

SEPHINE

Hard to believe that our loud, boisterous, bragging Mary Theresa could suddenly act like such a lady.

ANTON

Sephine, you have raised her better than you think. Even though that is a pretty good description of her.

SEPHINE

What do you think he's thinking?

ANTON

He has behaved with equal charm. We will find out his intentions soon, I think.

SEPHINE

I would say she has restrained herself rather well, considering that she is utterly smitten with him.

ANTON

Yes, I am thankful she has not devoured him.

SEPHINE

She obviously likes him.

ANTON

And so do you.

SEPHINE

Well, he owns sixteen estates.

ANTON

Is that all?

SEPHINE

You want him to own more estates?

ANTON

I want there to be more to him than his estates.

SEPHINE

Well, I certainly hope you are not going to be the one who stands in her way, Anton.

ANTON

Sephine, no one stands in Mary Theresa's way.

(ANTON and SEPHINE stroll offstage. JULES and MARY THERESA stroll forward.)

JULES

Mary Theresa, I have greatly enjoyed our time together these last two days. It has been a sublime pleasure to get to know you.

MARY THERESA

The pleasure has been mine, Jules.

JULES

I wish I could stay here longer, but unfortunately my duties call me away.

MARY THERESA

It must be a great honor and privilege to be a chamberlain to the Tsar.

JULES

Yes, of course, but it is a conflict, too. My Polish blood rebels.



MARY THERESA

I am glad to hear it. When my father took me to Poland, it changed my life. The Catholics are under such oppression there. They are forced to speak Russian in the schools. They cannot study their own literature. They cannot even have bank accounts. Do the Russians hate the Poles or do they just hate Catholics?

JULES

They do not separate the two. After all, the Poles do not separate the two either.

MARY THERESA

So true. Half my blood is Polish.

JULES

And half of mine.

MARY THERESA

You say your Polish blood rebels. When I was in Poland I saw either silent resignation or defiant insolence. The authorities have tried to transform a brave, free people into a mass of flattering slaves who would lick the hand that flogs them.

JULES

Mary Theresa, you are so eloquent. You should be a writer.

MARY THERESA

I suppose I am a writer. My mother makes me write in my diary every day.

JULES

It sounds like it would be a delightful and profound piece of literature.

MARY THERESA

Oh, I doubt that.

JULES

But I must commend your mother. What good exercise for your strong, creative spirit.

MARY THERESA

Thank you, Jules. You also are eloquent.

JULES

(Pauses)

I hope that I might see you again.

MARY THERESA

That would be lovely.

JULES

I have to go back to Warsaw, but I will be traveling to Vienna in a few weeks. Perhaps you and your father could take the train and meet me?

MARY THERESA

I will ask him. I am sure he will agree.

JULES

I will send a telegram with the details. Until then, Mary Theresa.

MARY THERESA

Until then.

(She extends her hand, and he takes it, bows and gives a gentlemanly kiss to the extended hand, and then turns and exits. After he is gone, she lifts her face upwards and clutches her arms around herself in a gesture of great romantic excitement.)

BLACKOUT

Scene 2

Setting: Mary Theresa's bedroom, Ledochowska Home. There is a bed and a desk.

At Rise: MARY THERESA sits at the desk writing in her diary. Enter JULIE.

JULIE

Papa is going to take Fanny and Ernestina to Poland.

MARY THERESA

He will take us all there eventually. You wait.

JULIE

They are going to visit an estate in Vilnius. I suppose there are a couple of eligible young men in that family.

MARY THERESA

Is that why they are going?

JULIE

Mama would like to see all of us married off as quickly as possible.

MARY THERESA

She has nine of us to marry off. It won't happen too quickly.

JULIE

(Pauses)

She won't see me married me off.

MARY THERESA

Julie, you are the prize in our family. Why have you been so reluctant?

JULIE

Mary Theresa, I want to tell you something. I have not told anyone else. I want to become a nun.

MARY THERESA

(Turns to her, lets it sink in)

Really?

JULIE

Really. I am going to join the Ursulines. If they will have me.

MARY THERESA

(Smiling)

Of course they will have you. I should have seen this coming. First Wladimir wants to become a priest and now you want to become a nun.

JULIE

It is not just what I want, you know. It is, I believe, what God wants. It is a calling.

MARY THERESA

Of course. I should not have said it that way. Forgive me. And of course Wladimir has a vocation.

JULIE

Wladimir will make a good priest. On that we all agree.

MARY THERESA

And you will make a good nun, Julie.

JULIE

I can only hope. I simply want to give myself entirely to God.

MARY THERESA

(Pauses, looks down at her diary)

I wonder what God wants from me.

JULIE

You are still waiting to hear from the debonair Jules.

MARY THERESA

Yes. But, nothing. Not a letter. Not a note. Not a telegram.

JULIE

When you went to visit him in Vienna, I know you returned disappointed. But I know you still had hope. And Papa, I know, still has hope.

MARY THERESA

It was a strange visit. It was much shorter than I thought it would be. Jules still seemed...interested. But also distracted. Something else was on his mind, it seems.

JULIE

He has great responsibilities.

MARY THERESA

Yes, I told myself that. I don't know what to tell myself now, however.

(Enter WLADIMIR, carrying a newspaper. He has a look of great concern.)

WLADIMIR

May I come in?

JULIE

Wladimir! We were just talking about you.

WLADIMIR

And why?

MARY THERESA

The future priest.

WLADIMIR

It is a long formation process, Mary Theresa.

(With good-natured sarcasm)

Sometimes I wonder if the Jesuits really want priests, they make it so hard on us!

MARY THERESA

You are already well-formed, Wladimir. You will be an outstanding Jesuit. And Julie has some news of her own.

WLADIMIR

What is it, Julie?

JULIE

I just told Mary Theresa. She is the only one who knows. I have decided to join the Ursulines.

WLADIMIR

(With great joy)

God bless you, Julie!

(And then a change in tone)

I'm afraid I have some more news. But not so good.

MARY THERESA

What, Wladimir?

WLADIMIR

(Holds up paper)

Jules Ostrowski. He...

JULIE

What? Is he...?

(MARY THERESA runs and snatches the paper from WLADIMIR and reads. Looks up slowly.)

MARY THERESA

Married.

(Drops the paper to the floor)

JULIE

Who?

WLADIMIR

A rich French heiress from Dijon.

JULIE

Mary Theresa, I'm so sorry...

WLADIMIR

Mary Theresa...

(They continue to speak to her, but their voices are not intelligible. A single, intense light comes up on MARY THERESA, center stage, while the rest of the stage fades into darkness, a low pulsing beat begins and grows louder. MARY THERESA begins to wince and rub the sides of her head. When she begins to speak there is something detached and dream-like in her tone, but then it becomes almost nightmarish.)

MARY THERESA

But I knew this was going to happen. I watched it rising like a black dawn. Of course, he would marry a rich heiress. His Polish blood rebelled against more Polish blood. And so that story will not be written. But what now? What story will it be? It's all wrong. Mama! What will you do with me? No man will marry me. You know that, don't you.

(Slight pause)

Julie! Give me your peace! Give me your prayer! What is the matter with me? Papa! Papa! Take me home.

(Pauses)

But I am home. I am home but I don't belong here. I don't feel right.

(She is in obvious physical discomfort)

Why is it so hot here? The fire of love has turned to the fire of hell! My skin! It itches. I want to tear it off, it itches so much! Oh my God, why have you forsaken me?

(Blackout. During the blackout MARY THERESA gets into the bed. Light slowly comes up, but the stage remains in semi-darkness. SEPHINE and JULIE huddle off to one side.)

SEPHINE

It is smallpox. She may die.

JULIE

She will not die, Mama.

SEPHINE

Remove the mirrors from her room.

JULIE

Do you think that will fool her?

SEPHINE

It is an act of mercy.

(Pauses)

The poor thing.

(Exit SEPHINE. JULIE approaches the bed.)

JULIE

Mary Theresa, are you awake?

MARY THERESA

Julie? Why is it so dark?

JULIE

The doctor says the light may aggravate your condition.

MARY THERESA

Tell Mama not to worry about the mirrors. I know that I am maimed for life. It is smallpox.

JULIE

The scars will heal, Mary Theresa. They will fade. But more importantly, you will heal.

MARY THERESA

Maybe. Maybe not. Perhaps this is the end of my life. Julie, you should not spend so much time with me. You risk getting sick yourself.

JULIE

I am going to take care of you. If I get sick, then I get sick. Christ suffered. Why should I care about suffering? Christ suffered more.

MARY THERESA

What am I going to do when you go off to the convent, Julie? You are the only one I can ever talk to.

JULIE

Talk to Jesus. He's an even better listener than I am.

MARY THERESA

I think I already know what he has to tell me. He has told me something by giving me smallpox. I have been too vain. I have always tried to outdo everyone else. Racing all my sisters and my brothers up the side of a mountain.

JULIE

And beating us.

MARY THERESA

But dancing on the top in victory.

JULIE

Now you have other victories to win, Mary Theresa. Eternal victories.

MARY THERESA

I wish I could be like you, Julie. And like Wladimir. I want to do something, too. Something great for God. But...I am not called to the religious life. And now, it appears I am not called to the married life either.

JULIE

You just haven't heard your call yet. Be patient.

(ANTON comes rushing in)

ANTON

Mary Theresa!

MARY THERESA

Papa!

ANTON

Do not die, my sweet Mary Theresa. You are my light.

MARY THERESA

Papa, you should not have come into my room. It is not safe.

ANTON

I will be fine. But you, we must not lose you, my precious one.

MARY THERESA

Thank you for taking me to Poland, Papa.

ANTON

Why are you thanking me for that now?

MARY THERESA

I just wanted you to know how much I appreciated seeing the land of your birth and meeting the Polish people, who will never be defeated.

ANTON



And yet they are always defeated.

MARY THERESA

And thank you for taking me to Vienna a few months ago.

ANTON

I'm glad you didn't marry that fool Ostrowski.

MARY THERESA

Papa, you only think he was a fool because he did not marry me.

ANTON

Precisely! What more evidence is needed?!

MARY THERESA

In that case, Papa, I'm afraid you will find the world full of fools.

ANTON

Mary Theresa, the only thing that matters is that the world is full of you, that you remain with us. I will deal with the fools of the world later.

MARY THERESA

And thank you for something else, Papa.

ANTON

What, my dear?

MARY THERESA

For your prayers. I have often seen you kneeling before a picture of Our Lady.

ANTON

(Pauses, moved)

Spying on me, Madame?

MARY THERESA

Papa, you must go now.

ANTON

I will visit you tomorrow.

MARY THERESA

Do not, Papa. And do not come closer, please.

ANTON

(Backing up, exiting)

I will blow you a kiss!

MARY THERESA

Thank you, Papa! God be with you!

BLACKOUT

INTERLUDE

(MELANIE, stage right)

MELANIE

Mary Theresa recovered from her illness.

(Pauses)

However, after visiting his daughter, Count Ledochowska contracted smallpox. He died four days later.

BLACKOUT

Scene 3

Setting: Ledochowska home.

At Rise: SEPHINE sits at a table looking over documents.

(Enter MARY THERESA)

SEPHINE

Sit down, Mary Theresa.

MARY THERESA

Yes, Mama.

(She sits)

SEPHINE

You understand that your father lost most of his fortune before he died.

MARY THERESA

I suspected that, Mama.

SEPHINE

We are in the difficult position of being of a noble class, but unable to support ourselves. Your father did manage to set aside some monies for each of you, but the problem is the more immediate future. Your sister Julie has joined the Ursulines. Your brother Wladimir the Jesuits. There is still a hope to marry off Ernestina and Fanny to suitable husbands. But it is clear that you will never be married and you have apparently no calling to the religious life.

MARY THERESA

That is probably the case, Mama.

SEPHINE

So I have made arrangements through the good graces of the Emperor to have you appointed as a Lady-in-Waiting in one of the most illustrious courts in Europe.

MARY THERESA

What? Where?

SEPHINE

In the court of the Archduke of Tuscany.

MARY THERESA

I'm going to Tuscany?

SEPHINE

No, you will still be right here in Austria.

MARY THERESA

But....

SEPHINE

The Archduke and Archduchess of Tuscany are now here in Austria.

MARY THERESA

Why?

SEPHINE

They are presently in exile, until the political situation in Italy calms down.

MARY THERESA

And what if it doesn't calm down?

SEPHINE

Of course it will calm down. Don't be so troublesome. You must learn to hold your tongue, and you will have plenty of practice doing that in the court.

MARY THERESA

What does a Lady-in-Waiting do? Will I be a servant?

SEPHINE

No, my dear. You will still be a countess. You will be one of the official companions of Her Imperial and Royal Highness, Alice the Grand Duchess of Tuscany. You will be part of the court. It is truly the noble life. But you must learn the etiquette of the court.

(Pauses)

And of course attend to the needs of the Grand Duchess.

MARY THERESA

So I will be a servant.

SEPHINE

No, there will be servants who will be the servants. As I said, you will be living the noble life.

(Pauses)

You will have duties, of course. And there are some very strict practices to which you must adhere. They have a certain way of doing things.

MARY THERESA

It sounds like being a servant.

SEPHINE

It will be a good life! You will be well taken care of and living among royalty. And we can be grateful for it!

MARY THERESA

(Pauses)

Yes, Mama.

BLACKOUT